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DINING WITH DUKE HUMPHREY

AND OTHER STORIES

BY JAMES GREENWOOD

LONDON: FREDERICK WARNE & Co

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9 DINING WITH DUKE HUMPHREY.

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DINING

WITH

DUKE HUMPHREY;

OR,

Curiosities of Life.

BY

JAMES GREENWOOD,

"THE AMATEUR CASUAL."

AUTHOR OF "ODD PEOPLE IN ODD PLACES."

LONDON:

FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.

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CONTENTS.

DINING WITH DUKE HUMPHREY.

Sketches of the People.

CRACKLING'S DOLE.

Only that his widow exacted of me a solemn promise that I would refrain from so doing, few things would afford me more pleasure than to make known to the world the real name of as kind a creature as ever—well, at all events, as ever kept a cook-shop.

It is now as nearly as possible twelve months since I first made his acquaintance. It was one of those good things, however, that are none the worse for being kept awhile, especially as I looked forward to another Christmas-time visit to his establishment, feeling, no doubt, that I should thus be able to add to my stock of material already in store. But when I proceeded to fulfil the last-mentioned intent, I discovered his amiable relict still doing a thriving business among the baked, and the roast, and the boiled; but, alas! her prim little cap of ribbon and lace had given place to widow's crape.

I was glad to find, however, that, all things considered, she was in excellent spirits, and I think she had abated not much of her buxomness. She had been bereaved, she informed me, since August last; and when I told her the business I had come on, she hastened to inform me that it was one of her husband's latest expressed wishes that she should keep up the old Christmas custom that for fifteen years they had faithfully observed.

"And please goodness," said she, her good-natured face beaming with kindly remembrance, "I intend doing so as long as I live and remain in business."

She was delighted when I intimated that her good man's demise need not prevent the appearance in print of my ex-

periences and observations on the occasion of my visiting the shop last Christmas Day, but she very much objected to his real name being mentioned, and she was equally anxious that the exact whereabouts of the premises should not be revealed. "I should not mind if I had no intention of keeping up the custom," said she, "but if it became commonly known it would quite spoil the idea. I should have such a crowd of those who were not the right sort here that I should be obliged to put up the shutters." In this last I felt compelled to agree with her, and as regards the suppression of her husband's name, I asked her if she would like to suggest a *nom de plume*. She pondered the matter for several seconds, her gaze meanwhile wandering over the well-stocked window-board as though for inspiration, and then suddenly, and with the satisfaction of a person who has exactly hit on what is required, she replied, "Call him Mr. Crackling."

Crackling himself was as jealous of his "secret" as though lasting disgrace would have been his portion had it been discovered, and the amazement and vexation visible on his jolly round face when, accompanied by a friend at noon of Christmas Day, I entered his shop and boldly taxed him with it, would not be easy to describe, whereas the real wonder was that it had not leaked out years before. It was simply as follows: Compassionating the melancholy and down-heartedness of those whose hard fate it was to go dinnerless on the day of all days when most folk were feasting, he had hit on an ingenious expedient to give comfort to some few of them, at any rate. His shop, though situated in a prosperous highway, is in the vicinity of an exceedingly poor "back" neighbourhood. He had observed that on Christmas Day more than at any other time the handsome array of eatables displayed in his window attracted the attention of "hard-up" wayfarers. From his place behind the counter it was his custom with his wife to keep a sharp look-out for the most manifestly miserable of these window-gazers, and without ceremony to beckon them in and sit them down to what he called a "fair tuck-in" of roast beef and plum pudding. There was not very much doing in the ordinary way of business at his establishment on Christmas, and for the respectable and paying class of customers there were the dining-rooms upstairs. The place set apart for his impecunious guests was the space at the

back of the shop, where there are several compartments calculated to accommodate ten or a dozen sitters, the occupants of each box being screened from the observation of adjoining diners by means of a short red curtain ringed overhead to a brass rail. My companion and myself occupied the box nearest the shop, from whence, without being seen, we had a view of the window; and the compartments being divided one from the other only by a thin partition, it was easy for a listener to overhear any conversation that might be going on amongst his neighbours.

Punctually at twelve o'clock, though more, I believe, as a lure for that particular class of guests the benevolent cookshop keeper had foremost in his mind than in the ordinary way of business, there was brought up from the kitchen a weighty and handsome joint of ribs of beef, deliciously fragrant and browned and garnished with horse-radish, and a couple of prodigious Christmas puddings, one of which, ornamented with a sprig of holly, was placed on either side of the beef. Within the first ten minutes several regular customers came in and were passed upstairs by the waiter, but it was fully twenty minutes before any of the hungry fish for whom the window was specially baited put in an appearance.

It never rains but it pours, they say, and when at last they arrived it was in a batch of three. They scarcely could be called chance passers-by, however; nor were they, strictly speaking, penniless. They were three boys, dirty, tattered, and pinched with the cold, and it was easy at a glance to discover what occupations they followed. The youngest, who was a capless, shoeless little wretch, certainly not more than eight years old, had a "cigar-light" box tucked under his arm; another, a couple of years older, perhaps, carried the stump of a birch-broom; while the third, who was the oldest and the hungriest, looking the most decently dressed, held in his hand a few local newspapers—dismally "dead" stock, considering the day and the hour.

The faces of Mr. and Mrs. Crackling lighted up as though the impending good fortune was theirs instead of the trio of poor little ragamuffins; and Crackling, from behind his hand, whispered to us, "Keep your eye on 'em, they 're the sort." We did as requested, as well as the steam on the window-pane would

permit. It was evident that urgent and anxious debate was going on amongst them. They scrutinized the tempting display closely and critically, but apparently with much more of disappointment than admiration; they seemed to be looking for something that was not there. What it was was presently made known, for the boy with the old broom stepped in, chinking halfpence in his hand.

"Ain't you got no plain, mister?" he inquired of Mr. Crackling. With an unmoved countenance that worthy tradesman shook his head.

"Plain plum or curran' I mean," pursued the "crossing" boy; "any sort 'll do."

"We don't keep plain sorts on Christmas Day," said Crackling; "only the rich kind—this sort," and he indicated one of the luscious spheres with the holly-sprig stuck in it. "You can have a few penn'orth of that if you like; it's dear, but it's beautiful—taste it."

And he helped the boy with the broom with a piece as large as a walnut, while his two friends outside, with their noses pressing the window-pane, stared at him with their mouths agape in wonder and amazement.

The delicious morsel was hot, but, rashly eager to realize all its delights, the boy bolted it, and it burnt his throat. But he didn't mind that.

"How much of it," he gasped, and with tears in his eyes, "how much of it for threepence?"

Mr. Crackling cut off a portion not more than three times larger than the tasting piece. "That's threepenn'orth," said he.

The broom boy's countenance fell.

"A jolly lot of good that 'll be for three hungry coves," he remarked; "we've only got threepence amongst us."

"Then I tell you what," said Mr. Crackling, with perfect seriousness, "I've got some cold suet pudding left from yesterday, and I can serve you with a good threepenn'orth of that if you like, and, being Christmas Day, I don't mind you and the other two chaps sitting down here to eat it."

The broom boy retired for a moment to make known the proposition to his friends, and how thankfully it was accepted was betokened by the promptitude with which they all three came in.

"Go and sit in the end box," said Mr. Crackling, "and I'll send it to you."

They did as they were bid, and we could hear them whispering together. The two who had remained outside plied the broom boy with eager questions concerning the "liker" of plum pudding they had seen Mr. Crackling give him, and, with the flavour of it still tingling his palate, he described his sensations from the instant it touched his lips till it was gone, prematurely engulphed, in terms that made them smack their lips audibly. They wondered how much of "cold suetty" they would get for their threepence, and augured from the cookshop man's kindness in asking them in to sit down, that they should probably get "a whacking lot" for their money. Meanwhile Mr. Crackling was generously filling their hot plates with beef, and pudding, and baked potatoes, and cabbage; and when all were ready the waiter, who was a lanky young man, with no doubt a good appetite of his own, but who nevertheless evidently experienced some difficulty in concealing his disgust, carried the dinners to where the expectant three sat.

We raised a tiny corner of our curtain that we might witness the effect as the waiter proceeded to lift the plates from his tray and to place them. The boys gazed in speechless amazement at the attendant, with mouths ajar, and then, like boys half awakened from a dream, they looked at each other. The poor hungry-looking newspaper boy turned white as a sheet, and the newspapers he had tucked into the bosom of his jacket rustled with his trembling. The crossing-sweeper was the first one to recover the faculty of speech. He lifted his plate from the tablecloth back on to the tray.

"You'll get yourself into a jolly row, young feller," said he to the waiter in a severe undertone. "Take 'em away to them that ordered 'em, good luck to yer, before the guvner sees yer. Ourn's three of cold suetty."

"Yours is what's give you," returned the waiter haughtily, but not loud enough for Mr. Crackling to overhear him, "and don't cheek me, so I tell you."

And he was flouncing out of the box when the broom boy laid a detaining hand on the tails of his coat.

"There's summat wrong, I tell you," he exclaimed. "Hi, mister!"

This last to Mr. Crackling, who immediately came forward. He walked up to the table, and without anything in his countenance to provide them with the least clue to the mystery, in full view of them and their plates, remarked, "If you three boys don't keep quiet and get on with your dinners, I shall have to be angry with you, and you won't like that, I promise you."

There could be no mistake about it. The roast beef and plum pudding were intended for them, and, as Mr. Crackling retreated, the newspaper boy remarked, in a nervous whisper, to the broom boy, who had turned back his cuffs, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm a-going to get on with my lot and chance it," was the sturdy response, "and you" (this to the cigar-light boy) "do the same, young 'un, while it's 'ot."

"But what's the reason of it?"

"Gone mad, *I* should think," returned the broom boy, bolting a baked potato.

"But," gasped the timid young newsvendor, "s'pose he was to come to his senses again before we're done?"

"He'll have to change wery sudden if he comes to his senses before I've done," retorted the calm trencherman, speaking through a mouthful of plum pudding; "get on, and don't jaw so much, that's a good feller."

At that moment a short cough from Mr. Crackling caused us to look shopward, and in time to discern at the street side of the shop window a gaunt individual, whose grey hair betokened him as being past middle age. His clothes were of respectable cut, though woefully shabby, with the coat-collar secured at the throat with a pin, and blue-nosed and famished-looking he stood blowing on his knuckles, and staring with a fascinated gaze at the roast beef kept piping hot on its metal dish. Mr. Crackling gave a louder cough, and the man outside started and looked up, and misconstruing the sound to be an indication of the shopkeeper's displeasure that he should stand there blocking the public view of the viands exposed for sale, he was hastily moving off, when he must have seen or fancied that he saw Mr. Crackling beckoning him. He was no beggar, however, and, though he hesitated for a moment, he walked on

"Did you ever see such a poor starved cat of a man?" remarked Mrs. Crackling to her husband. "Drat him, poor fellow! why didn't he step in and see what you was beckoning him for?"

But, as luck would have it, the hunger of the gaunt one rebelled too strongly against his pride to consent to his throwing away even the remotest chance, and slowly, very slowly, and with only half an eye towards the window, he presently passed again. He must have been blind had he missed the signal this time, for Mr. Crackling gesticulated him with all the energy with which a would-be passenger hails a distant and almost hopeless omnibus. He affected surprise, and with one hand in the bosom of his coat, and with an old glove in the other, he turned back and came a step or two into the shop.

"I beg pardon," he began, in genteel tones, "was I mistaken when I thought that you made a sign that you wished to speak with me?"

"Quite right," returned Mr. Crackling, stooping across the counter, so that it was unnecessary for him to raise his voice above a whisper for the other to hear. "I wished to ask you if as a favour—as a favour, mind you, to my wife as well as myself—you will have a bit of dinner?"

We could see plainly enough from our box that the gaunt one had it in his heart to resent the liberty taken with his poverty, and to stiffly decline the invitation. But in facing round, probably with that object, his eyes encountered those of Mrs. Crackling—kindly, pitying eyes, and with her face in such a pucker of womanly sympathy that he was vanquished in an instant.

"God bless you for such goodness to a stranger," he said, huskily.

But I don't think Mr. Crackling heard him, he was so busy with his carving-knife on the ribs of beef. He had not been seated with a well-filled plate before him five minutes, when my suspicions that occasionally Mr. Crackling's artful plan for relieving the necessitous on Christmas Day might be abused, was, I am afraid, confirmed.

Two young fellows next came to the window, and had his experience been as extensive as mine are among such characters,

the charitable cookshop keeper would have recognized them as cadgers of the true Mint Street type. Either they had been there on some previous year, or an obliging acquaintance had put them up to it. They were tattered and threadbare, but as much as was shown of their shirts at the chest part was scrupulously clean, as was their face, and their hair was sleek and shiny as soap could make it. They were dolefully wending their melancholy way, when, unexpectedly, they found themselves exactly in front of Mr. Crackling's shop, and there remained transfixed at the abundance of delicious food there exhibited. They overdid the pantomime to such an extent it was a marvel it passed muster. They whimpered and whispered dejectedly one to the other, and hungrily bared their teeth as they eagerly pointed at the beef and at the puddings; they tapped their empty pockets, and soothingly chafed their waistbands with an open hand to pacify inner complainings. But they never once looked at Mr. or Mrs. Crackling, and seemed startled as though electrified when the former presently raised his hand and beckoned them in.

"I suppose you chaps could eat a jolly good dinner if you could get one for nothing? Go and sit down."

"Oh, sir! thank you kindly, too;" and, with a curious instinctive knowledge as to where they were expected to sit, they wriggled their way to a box in an instant.

It was a barefaced imposition; but I would not have opened the worthy man's eyes to the cheat that had been put on him on any account. His faith was tightly pinned to the system, and, as far as I had seen, in the majority of cases it worked well. It was no fault of his that, being prepared to entertain at least a dozen penniless guests, only six presented themselves during the hour we remained there, though more may have come in after we came away.

Nor, as already remarked, were three of the hungry company absolutely destitute of money—as the haughty waiter found, no doubt, to his deep vexation and humiliation. The three young gentlemen who had just entered, having dined to their hearts' content, came to the counter, and the crossing-sweeper, being spokesman, gratefully and earnestly thanked Mr. Crackling for what they described as "the best tuck-out they 'd ever had in all their lives." And then, turning to the haughty waiter, the broom

boy further remarked, "Likewise we 're much obliged to you for waiting on us, and we 've left you a trifle for yourself on the table." It was the threepence originally mustered among them to pay for the cold suet pudding.

DINING WITH DUKE HUMPHREY.

It was now nearly two o'clock, and no one else had paused to look hungrily in at Mr. Crackling's window for at least ten minutes, when there appeared at the street side of the sash a woman, whose behaviour was such that we did not quite know what to make of it. She was very poorly clad, but as clean and tidy as could be, and there was nothing in the expression of her face, as she stood wistfully regarding the smoking ribs of beef, to denote that she was one of the hungry and penniless class. On the contrary, it was with a cheery, though a puzzled look, that she scanned the good things in the window, meanwhile hugging something beneath her threadbare shawl as though, as it seemed to me, her difficulty was rather that she could not decide what to purchase. Mr. Crackling looked at his wife, and asked with his eyes, "Shall I beckon her in?" But that good lady shook her head dubiously, and as she did so the woman outside went away.

"She 's off," remarked Mr. Crackling in a dissatisfied tone. "I 'm half afraid we didn't do right in letting her go, missus."

"Well, goodness me, she didn't look very sorrowful, now, did she?" his wife replied; when just at the moment the woman returned and entered the shop, at the same time producing the "something" that was hidden beneath her shawl, and which proved to be a large dinner-plate.

"I want you," said she, pleasantly, as she laid a shilling on the counter, "to do me a favour, if you will be so kind. I want a dinner for a person who, though not exactly ill, is an invalid, so I should like it cut very nice, please."

The cookshop proprietor, treating her as an ordinary customer, clapped a weight on the scales, and inquired which joint she would have a cut from.

"Oh, I don't exactly mean that," she replied; "I want a dinner—a 'serving,' if you can understand it better that way. Roast beef, with a bit of horse-radish and baked potato, and a bit of cabbage, and a nice piece of plum pudding—a shilling's-worth altogether. But I want it all to look just as it would if it was served from our own dinner-table at home."

There was nothing remarkable in any one making a purchase such as she proposed, but her earnest manner as she requested that it might be made to look "just as if it was served from our own dinner-table" was striking. The matter, however, would no doubt have passed without attracting special attention had it not happened, just as Mr. Crackling had filled the plate to the customer's evident satisfaction, that there suddenly appeared in the doorway a pale-faced and lean little boy of eight or nine years old, perhaps, attired in a much-patched clean white pinafore, and with a ragged red comforter wisped round his throat. He carried in his arms two loaves of the half-quartern size, surmounted with a piece of Dutch cheese that weighed half a pound maybe.

"Have you got it, mother?" he eagerly asked; "have you got grandfather's dinner?"

Then he paused for several seconds, with his lips screwed up to the shape of an "O," as Mr. Crackling liberally endowed the tempting plateful with gravy, and presently ejaculated,

"Don't it smell proper? I wish ourn smelt like it, don't you, mother?" And as he spoke he cast such a rueful glance at the cold slab of cheese that crowned the dry bread in his arms, there could be little doubt as to the "ourn" he alluded to.

The poor woman looked distressed and embarrassed, and something very like two tears mounted in a moment to her eyes. But she made believe to treat the matter lightly.

"We shan't starve, Jimmy," said she, "while we can get good bread and cheese for dinner; we'll all have beef and pudding when father's ship comes home." And carefully covering the hot dinner she had bought into a corner of her shawl, they hurried off together.

Here was mystery. What kind of a family could it be all the members of which dined off bread and cheese on Christmas Day excepting one, the grandfather, who was privileged to regale on seasonable cheer? Who was father, whose ship "Brighter

Times" was at present so hopelessly distant from home that it was necessary to observe such rigid economy in the victualling department pending her arrival with a full freight? The friend who was with us I knew was fidgetty to do some one a good turn—might not here be an opportunity? As his eye met mine I saw that pretty much the same speculation was running in his mind, and with a mutual nod we agreed to try it, anyhow. So, telling Mr. Crackling that we should probably be back again in a short time, we set out after Jimmy and his mother.

We saw them turn into a narrow street, and arrived at the entrance to it in time to see them go into one of the small houses about half-way down. My impatient friend was for following there and then, but it was a delicate matter, and required some deliberation. So, having made sure which house it was, we took a few minutes' turn round the houses, to invent and arrange an excuse for our visit. But somehow we could not hit on one that was in the least plausible or to our liking; and while we were still debating the matter over, who should we spy, running up the street with a small jug in his hand, and evidently bound for the public house at the farther corner, but the boy in the pinafore and the red comforter, and at once resolved to interrogate him for our enlightenment. We came on him just as he was emerging from the door of the tavern with half a pint of beer.

"Hallo, Jimmy!" exclaimed my waggish friend, affecting old acquaintanceship and familiarity with the boy's family affairs. "How's grandfather? and how did you enjoy the roast beef and plum pudding you had for dinner?"

Jimmy stood regarding us with a puzzled and suspicious expression of countenance, but evidently he did not remember to have seen us before. It seemed plain, however, that we had touched on a subject that was occasioning him some perturbation at the moment when we accosted him. Great as may have been his reverence for his venerable relative, it was not sufficient to prevent his envying him his good fortune in the matter of Christmas dinner.

"What, do you mean that there beef and pudden that mother bought at the cookshop?" he inquired.

Being answered in the affirmative, he shook his head dismally.

"We never had none of that," said he; "that was for grandfather. He 's a-eatin' of it now. We 've got on'y bread and cheese."

It was unmistakably a satisfaction to unbosom himself of his grievance, though it was but to strangers, from whom he could expect but little sympathy. Yet he continued, with a rebellious determination to extend his confidence, "Bread and cheese is all that we 've got—father and mother and all us children—and grandfather is upstairs eatin' hisen all by hisself."

But the moodiness cleared from his countenance, as he almost immediately added, "But that ain't the lark of it, though."

We gave him to understand that we were glad to hear that there was a "lark of it," and inquired what was the nature of it.

"Grandfather thinks," returned Jimmy with a grin, and as though about to relate the best joke that ever was told, "that we 'ave got the same dinner as 'e 'as, and father 'e 's been a-sharpin' the knives and rattlin' the plates so that he might hear it all, and go on thinkin' so. This 'ere 'arf-pint of fourp'ny is for grandfather as well," the boy continued, ready to laugh aloud at the fun of the thing. "Mother 'll take it up to 'im, and pour it out of the big jug just as though it was 'is share left out of a pint and a 'arf."

"Then your father and mother won't have any beer?"

"Not a blessed drop," said Jimmy. "Isn't it a lark? Wouldn't grandfather go on if 'e knew how we was cheating 'im?"

"But supposing he was to come downstairs unexpectedly and find out all about it?"

"He can't; 'e 's bedrid in both his legs," replied the boy, giggling with glee, as though this, the climax, was the story's funniest part; "'e couldn't do more 'n knock with 'is stick if the 'ouse was afire."

And then with a nod for each of us, and a knowing look as though he meant us to understand that "mum" was the word, and on no account were we to reveal a single syllable of what he had confided to us, to make up for lost time he ran off as fast as his diminutive legs could carry him.

It was Jimmy himself who, a minute or two afterwards, opened the door in response to our modest application of the knocker at the house we had seen him enter. He turned red

and then white, and was evidently overwhelmed with confusion and dismay as he beheld us. The surprise of his parents, and of his brothers and sisters, at the unexpected appearance of visitors, was too great for them to notice these evidences of Jimmy's guilt. Two steps over the threshold, and we were in the midst of the family, the door opening at once into the scantily furnished little parlour, at a round table in the centre of which sat father and mother and five small boys and girls (exclusive of a few-months'-old baby the mother was nursing), and each of them had before them a ration of bread and cheese. A half-consumed ration was on the table in front of a vacant stool, and was doubtless the property of the penitent traitor who had betrayed the family secret, and who, remaining behind us when he opened the door, jerked continuously and stealthily at the skirt of my coat, in dumb entreaty for us not to make known the particulars of our recent meeting.

We hastened to calm his alarms by apologizing to his parents for our unwarranted intrusion, and for which we professed no other justification or excuse than that, happening to accost the intelligent little lad who had fetched the beer, we were so pleased with his civil and respectful way of replying that we had intended to give him half a crown by way of a Christmas-box, but that he had hurried away so quickly we had no time to carry out the intention, and so we had taken the liberty to follow him home.

It was my companion who made this not altogether disingenuous little speech, at the same time producing a half-crown and pressing it on the bewildered Jimmy's acceptance.

"And if you will pardon the freedom of my so doing," he continued, addressing the father, "I should esteem it a privilege to be permitted to make each of his brothers and sisters a small present as well. I am afraid they must find their dinner of bread and cheese on a day like this——!"

It was one of those inconvenient and awkwardly constructed little dwellings where the upper rooms are reached by a flight of stairs opening from the lower apartment, and with a door for shutting the said stairs off. The door at the moment happened to be ajar, and from the sudden way in which Jimmy's parent jumped up and closed it, and set his back against it, one might have supposed that instead of explaining a benevolent design,

my friend had announced himself an officer of the law whose business it was to arrest some person in the chamber above and convey him straight to a debtors' prison.

"I'm afraid you've done it," he exclaimed, in an agitated voice, which, however, was raised not much above a whisper. "It's lucky my wife's father's a little hard of hearing, but I wouldn't have had him hear what you said for as many half-crowns as there are days in the week."

And he opened the door a little way, and applied his ear at the crevice. Nothing, however, was to be heard, as we listened in breathless silence, but a shaky old voice contentedly humming some kind of tune; and with the great relief he felt depicted on his face, he gently closed the door again, and latched it, and returned to his bread and cheese. Never dreaming that we were already in possession of a clue to these extraordinary proceedings, he remarked, still speaking in a low tone of voice,

"You'll excuse my rudeness in interrupting you in what you was saying, sir, but I had my reasons for it. Being gentlemen and strangers, it isn't very likely you'd care to hear 'em; but you may take my word for it, there are reasons, and good 'uns."

Jimmy's small brothers and sisters had by this time been enriched to the extent of a shilling each, and the same amount of bounty having been bestowed even on the baby, its mother was moved to friendliness towards us, and remarked,

"Well, there's one thing, father, if the gentlemen did care to hear your reasons and you told 'em, they are not such as you need be ashamed of."

"Well, it isn't worth mentioning at all if it comes to that," the little man remarked, with a bit of a laugh. "It is more a joke, in a manner of speaking, than anything else. It is in this way, you see, sir. My wife's father he lives along with us, and so he shall do as long as I've got a meal to share along with him."

"You're a noble fellow, and the sentiment does you honour," remarked my companion.

"Not in the least, sir, thanky. I don't deserve the compliment, and I am not going to accept of it," said Jimmy's father. "It is the old gentleman's due, and the least I can do for him. The times I've been bowled over in business, and the times while he had the money to do it with he has set me on my legs again, you'd hardly believe if I told you. I'm a grocer by

trade, but somehow I 've always been unfortunate. It 's years now since I was a master, and a good long time since I had a regular shop as shopman. You see, grocers don't care about employing middle-aged hands," continued the bald-headed little man, with a sigh; "naturally they prefer shopmen that are sharp and smartly dressed, and always ready with a pleasant word for a customer, consequently I 'm glad to take an odd job wherever I can get one. I haven't been very lucky lately, but at Christmas-time there is a good chance for a grocer's counter-man, and I hoped to get a week's work at least. But I was disappointed here, and I was disappointed there, till at last I was thankful to get a Christmas Eve and a Christmas morning's job at a shop in Lambeth Walk. Precious thankful I was, because the fact is we were so hard pushed that the old gentleman's Christmas dinner depended on it, and you never knew a man, sir, who thought more about Christmas. When he had his family about him it was his delight to make a spread that the Lord Mayor of London himself would hardly have turned up his nose at had he been obliged to sit down to it, and he still thinks a lot about it now he 's lost the use of his legs, and we 're all poor together. He 'd break his heart, poor old chap, if he was aware that we were 'dining with Duke Humphrey,' as they say, and didn't have anything better than bread and cheese. So, you see, we 're obliged to put a bit of a trick on him. We did it last year, and we did it again this. We got him a nice dinner—he 's got an amazing appetite for his age—of roast beef and plum pudding from the cookshop, and we make pretend that we 've all got the same. It 's a bit of fun for us, you see, to keep up the joke," continued the kind-hearted poor fellow—it may have been that a morsel of crust went the "wrong way," occasioning the wry face that Jimmy at this moment made—"we keep it up all the time he 's eating his dinner, making a rattle with the plates and knives, and asking aloud if this one will take a bit more brown, or t' other one another spoonful of gravy. Now you understand, sir, the reason why I was so anxious to shut the door when you began to make mention of our having bread and cheese for dinner."

"Of course, we understand," remarked my companion, who, I may remark, is as kind-hearted a creature as ever lived, "and, as I said before, you are a good fellow. And now," he con-

tinued, nudging me, and all of a sudden assuming the manner of a man in a mighty hurry, "now I think we will bid you good day."

"I shouldn't have stood so long," I remarked when we were in the street, "if I had known you wished to come away."

"I was anxious to get away," he replied, "before Mr. Crackling closed his premises and sold out his stock. It is half-past two o'clock now. We shall have to be quick."

It did not take us five minutes to get back to the cookshop, and my good friend fairly clapped his hands with delight when, just as we entered, the cook brought up from the kitchen uncut, and smoking hot, another Christmas pudding. The remainder of the ribs of beef was still in capital cut, and smoking hot too (there must have been seven or eight pounds of it).

"Don't cut another morsel of it," my friend exclaimed, "I want it all, and that pudding as well, with as big a dishful of baked potatoes as you can supply. And I want you to clap it all on a tray, and be good enough to allow your young man to carry it all round to 15 —— Street."

My friend very cheerfully paid for this unexpected Christmas dinner for the out-of-work grocer's shopman, and before we left Mr. Crackling's we saw the waiter fairly started with his load, and there being an end to the matter, as far as we were concerned, I must leave what afterwards happened to the reader's imagination.

THE BATTLE OF THE PUDDINGS.

Extraordinary behaviour of a refractory pauper—His anxiety to be sent to prison for fourteen days instead of seven—I renew his acquaintance on his discharge from Coldbath Fields—He proves to be late a parish beadle—The story of his downfall—A victim to misplaced confidence and woman's wiles—The Battle of the Puddings—He agrees to deal with the mysterious packet of spice—The awful *dénouement*, and the beadle's prospects blighted for ever.

I ONCE chanced to be present at a certain metropolitan police-court (my reasons for not making known which one will presently appear) when a "refractory pauper" was placed in the prisoner's dock. He was so strikingly different from the ordinary poor wretch brought before the magistrate to answer for his rebellion against workhouse rules and regulations, that I immediately felt an interest in him. He was not a lean and hungry pauper, but a stout-built and well-fed-looking man, though the bagginess of his cheeks, the dulness of his eyes, and his melancholy aspect generally denoted that he was at present out of condition. Judging from his partially bald head and his grey hair, his age may have been between fifty and sixty, and he stood to answer for his offence in an ashamed sort of way, and with as much of his round face concealed as could be covered with one hand.

He had been guilty of an extraordinary outrage. While seated the previous evening at the fire in the common ward, with some other paupers, without any quarrel or provocation he had suddenly risen up against them and pummelled them indiscriminately left and right, until the uproar brought the master on to the scene, and a police officer was called in. When requested to explain his extraordinary behaviour, the delinquent calmly replied it would be quite useless for him to enter into any explanation, though he could if he thought proper to do so. What he had done, he said, was with a purpose, and that the best thing would be for the policeman to take him into custody, so that he might be dealt with by a magistrate. Under such circumstances it was only natural that his worship should ask if the man was in his right senses, and, being assured that he was, sentenced him to seven days' imprisonment. Instead, however

of exhibiting satisfaction at the leniency of the judgment, the prisoner, hastily removing his hand from before his face, exclaimed, in anxious tones,

"Couldn't your worship make it fourteen days? I shall regard it as a great favour if you would do so."

But the magistrate merely waved his hand by way of reply, and there was a titter in court as the culprit was removed, the general impression evidently being that the remark was prompted either in sarcasm or impudence. It did not seem so to me, however. There was in the expression of his face, as he was led away, that which denoted him a baffled and a disappointed man. My curiosity being roused, I questioned the workhouse master concerning him, and from what he told me I resolved to endeavour to cultivate a brief acquaintance with the eccentric pauper when, at the expiration of a week, he would be enlarged from limbo.

It was easy enough afterwards to distinguish him among the six or eight other prisoners that represented the morning's gaol delivery, and as he was hurrying away, dejected and downcast, I ventured to accost him. I frankly gave him to understand that I had chanced to be present at the police-court at the time of his appearance there, and that I had judged from his demeanour that he was not a pauper of the common order, but more probably a person who until misfortune overtook him had moved in respectable society. In terms as delicate as at the moment occurred to me I further intimated to him that, assuming the latter to be the case, if he would confide to me what his trouble was, I might be able to assist him.

Seven days of incarceration and oakum-picking had, no doubt, made him low-spirited. He stopped abruptly when I ceased to address him, and with his large face twitching with suppressed emotion, gazed for several seconds at me with watery eyes. Then he clutched my hand in his own, and squeezing it hard, turned away sobbing. It was between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, and the spectacle of an elderly person of his proportions weeping in public was not so common but that it was likely to attract the attention of passers-by. Fortunately there was a decent-looking coffee-shop close at hand, and as he had not yet let go my hand, I had no difficulty in leading him thither. After a week's dieting on bread and water only, his

grief was not so absorbing as to prevent him doing ample justice to the substantial steak that in a short time was set before him, and I took care not to encourage him to conversation until he had quite finished it. That point arrived at, he required but little urging.

"There are springs, sir, in human natur'," he commenced, as he pensively stirred the coffee remaining in his cup, "that, no matter when or where they may be touched, are like touching the spring of a secret drawer or anything of that kind. They fly open, revealing all that's inside. That was the case with me when you so kindly addressed me in the street just now. Your observation, if I remember rightly, sir, was that I seemed like a person whose nat'ral spear was not that of a pauper. Yourn is a penetratin' eye, sir, and does honour to your heart; but if I might take the liberty, I would wish to remark that I am not all surprised that you made the discovery. A child might have made it, sir. It is so fully growed and developed in me, sir, that a work'us suit can't conceal it. It busts out at the seams and shows itself in the very buttons. I am aware of it, sir," he continued, with bitter emphasis and a sob that portended another gush of grief, "it is the torture and terror of my life."

He gulped down the threatened outburst with the last of his coffee, and then, after a pause, during which he gazed at me as steadfastly as the quivering of his eyelids would permit, he remarked,

"Would you do me the favour, sir, as to inform me what, in your opinion, is the station in life I might have been used to occupying?"

I replied that it was difficult to guess, but that his general aspect gave me the impression that, at all events, his previous pursuits were not incompatible with ease of mind and good living.

"You may, perhaps, have been a prosperous innkeeper, or possibly a butler or coachman in some wealthy family," said I.

I thought that I was flattering him to increased confidence by according so much, but the expression on his face betrayed that my speculations as to his antecedents scarcely came up to his anticipations.

"Well, of course I might have followed either of the ockipa-

tions you mention," he replied, "and I don't say, mind you, that I should have been ashamed to own it. But you are wide of the mark, sir; miles off it. I'm——leastways, have been—a officer, sir."

And with an air that assorted oddly with his humble garb, he straightened himself on his seat, and his fat finger and thumb sought his shirt-collar, but, reminded at first touch of its unstarched limpness, he lowered his hand disgustfully.

"An officer," I repeated; "dear me! In the army or the navy, may I ask?"

I could see by the shake of his head that I was not even now doing him justice.

"When I said an officer, sir," he replied, "I was speaking parochially. For nineteen years I have been, and should still be, but for the treachery and malice of my enemies, a ——" leaning across the table and uttering the words under cover of his hand—"a parish beadle!"

I endeavoured to look as astonished as he would have me at the startling intimation, and remarked that he must find it hard indeed to reconcile his present humble position with a post of such distinction and authority.

"It is not to be done, sir," he returned, with a doleful wag of his double chin; "you can no more do it than you can reconcile fire with water, or the heagle or the helephant with the crawlingist things going. It's agin' natur. The only comfort I've got is that they—the paupers, I mean—don't know anything about me or what I've been. They may have their suspicions that I'm somebody uncommon, and they certainly do seem puzzled, and as though they didn't know what to make of it, when sometimes I'm aggrawated to eye 'em over or to speak to 'em in my old way. Its a relief to do it at times, but I daren't try it on too often for fear my secret should leak out. But I can't always control myself; I can't expect to. When a man has been used for nineteen years to commanding and ordering his inferiors about, he seems somehow to get saterated with his official spirit, and it can't be wrung out of him entirely, however hard he may be squeezed in the hard grip of adversity. The wonder to me is that I don't let it out in my sleep. How could I? You wouldn't ask if you knew what sort of dreams I have.' And as he spoke he looked so intensely miserable, I could not

but pity him. "I'm haunted by him as regler as clock-work."

"Haunted by whom?"

"By him—by myself that used to be—by the beadle that was," he made answer in a melodramatic whisper; "if I'd a-murdered him he couldn't act more sewere by me."

"Perhaps he holds you responsible for terminating his existence," I suggested.

"And I wouldn't be guilty of the falsity of denying it, sir," he promptly responded; "but if I did do away with him, with my natural self I mean, it was not done in wickedness—it was no more my fault than it was yours, sir. Yet, sure as I go to bed thinking about what used to be and what is now, soon as I fall asleep there he stands at the foot of the bedstead full-dressed for going to church—in his bottle-green coat trimmed with gold lace, and his weskit to match, all complete, even to his cocked hat and the bookay in his buttonhole; and he shakes his head that mournful and reproaching that it gives me the creeps to look at him, and then he grows paler and paler till he fades away into the whitewashed wall behind him, and vanishes." And the voice of the distressed ex-beadle grew tremulous and husky, and he again hid his face in his handkerchief. By way of rousing him I reminded him of the strange request he had made to the magistrate, and inquired as to his reason for wishing to be sent to prison for a fortnight instead of a week.

"It was stated against you," said I, "that when asked why you committed the unprovoked assault on the old fellows who were sitting with you in the ward, you replied that you had a purpose in doing so. Was that the case?"

He did not reply for several seconds, but sat with his face concealed, as though pondering in his mind whether he should confide to me the story of his woes. Fortunately, he presently decided in my favour. Pocketing the handkerchief, and recovering himself with an effort, he remarked,

"When you ask me that question, you come to the p'int at once, sir. I had a purpose in what I did; I bore 'em no malice, and I didn't hit 'em hard, but I had a object in view. But to make you understand it I should have to make known to you the circumstances that led to my downfall. You have showed yourself, sir, to be a gentleman with a heart that can

feel for the distresses of another, and if you 've a mind to listen, I 'll tell you all about it." I at once expressed my willingness to listen to his narrative, and he immediately launched it.

"You 'll excuse me, sir," he began, "if I only reweal the hard —the cruelly hard—facts, without mentioning names and places. My misfortunes, sir, are all owing to a Christmas pudding." He uttered the words slowly and mournfully, and paused to observe their effect on me. My instant impression—founded, no doubt, on the proneness he had exhibited to fall foul of his fellow-men —was that at some time or other he had over-fed himself with the article mentioned, and in a fit of irritability, induced by indigestion, committed an assault that led to his dismissal from office. "Understand me," he presently continued, "it was not a common or a private sort of pudding, but a parochial one— the anniwal pudding that every parish prides itself on producing, and which you may read all the particulars of in the newspapers, as no doubt you are aware." I intimated with a nod that I was aware of it. "'Course you must be," he went on. "It has growed to be quite a institution of the country. There is what they call the blue ribbin of the Turf, which is run for every year on Derby Day at Epsom; and there 's what you might call the blue ribbin of the work'us kitchen, competed for at Christmas-time by every parish in the metropolis. Just as the weights of the horses and the names and colours of the jockeys are published afore the race," continued the ex-beadle, emerging somewhat, as I was glad to observe, from his melancholy as he warmed into the old familiar subject, "so is it made known in print the day before Christmas Day how much flour and fruit, suet and spice, and how many eggs each work'us has at stake in the great event. All that the public know about it or all they care is that the paupers eat it in a extray feed along with their beef on Christmas Day. But in parochial circles, sir, more importance hangs to it. Only them that are behind the scenes know of the anxiety the affair produces, and how that every one —guardians, vestrymen, beadle—down even to the old women helps in the kitchen—are nearly off their heads with the excitement of going in for first prize. I wish it had not been so. Leastways, I wish that I hadn't allowed my feelings for the honour of our work'us to carry me the lengths they did," and he shook his head with a sad sigh; "and more than all, I wish I

hadn't been such a delooded fool as to be humbugged by the woman I'd a-laid down my life for."

His voice at this point became almost inaudible, and it was several seconds before he could proceed. "As I told you before, sir, I will not mention names or places, but it came about in this way. The party—the female, I mean—I just now alluded to was head nurse at another work'us, and she being a widder and me a widderer, we came to know each other, and to my mind the matter was as good as settled, though I knew that the man cook at the same work'us as she was was her fust cousin, and that at one time she had kept company with him.

"Well, sir, you must know that our work'us and theirn had run neck-and-neck, in a manner of speaking, for three years in succession, for the best pudding, and that year we were going to do our very best, if we had never done it before. But, of course, as you may understand, although the two parishes were fighting against each other, we—me and the female party I mentioned—were none the less friendly on that account, and it was only natural that I should think she had a stronger leaning to'rds me than to'rds the pudding and her party. We wor talking of being married at Whitsun, in fact; therefore I was not surprised at something she had to say to me when I met her the Sunday evening before the Christmas Day. She was going to leave the parish service when we were married, as they had served her shabby, she said, and she would like to do them a bad turn before she left. 'And I think we can do the trick nicely now, Robert,' says she. 'A uncle of mine who is head cook in a nobleman's family is famous for his Christmas puddings, and all on account of a secret spice he puts in 'em. I went to see him last week,' she says, 'and after a deal of persuasion I got him to give me a packet of it. All you 've got to do is to introduce it into your people's pudding, and it will come off with flying colours, and our people won't have a look in against it either for flavour or colour.' 'But I can't do it,' I says; 'the cook at our place is such an opinionated old fellow, he wouldn't use it if I was to give it him.' 'Then win all the glory for yourself,' says she. 'It smells just like common mixed spice. Do it up in a paper just like that your mixed spice comes in, and find an opportunity to change the packets.' It was a tempting offer, and I liked the idea of it. Of course I could go

into the kitchen whenever I liked, and I knew when the Christmas grocery was coming in. 'But,' I says, 'how can I prove my right to the credit of the victory unless I can show that it was me who changed the spice?' 'Write,' says she, 'to the chairman of guardians overnight, so that he'll get it fust post of the morning, when the puddings are put into the copper, that they'll be something uncommon this year, and that it is your doing.' Well, sir, never dreaming of willany or treachery, I did what she advised up to the letter, and what do you think happened?" And his trembling hand once again sought his pocket-handkerchief ere he could proceed. "I was sold, sir. Goodness only knows what was in that confounded packet that looked like spice, but when the puddings was turned out of the cloths they were all speckled green, and smelt as though they'd been made in a painter's shop. And the worst of it was they were took out of the coppers in my own presence, and in the presence of the guardian I had written to the night before. I was ruined, sir; it was no use my offering explanations. It had to be made known that, 'owing to an unavoidable accident,' there would be no Christmas pudding at our work'us this year, and I was sacked at the very next board meeting. And that was not the worst of it," he continued, with a spasmodic gasp. "It was all an arranged thing between her and that dratted fust cousin of hers, and they were married on New Year's Day."

And arrived at this, the harrowing climax to his story, he was so overcome that no words of mine could console him. He could not finish the narrative. He became so hysterical with grief that the other customers in the coffee-shop gathered about him wondering what was the matter, and I found a resumption of his story impossible. It was an exceedingly unsatisfactory ending, but there was no help for it. I should like to have learnt and been able to tell why he maltreated his brother paupers, and why he was anxious to change the workhouse for a prison until Christmas was over. I can only conjecture it was because the odour of parochial Christmas pudding had become odious to him, and he was afraid that if he subjected himself to its influence he might become so maddened as to murder somebody, and so get himself hanged and out of his misery.

THREE HALF-CROWNS.

Where is Potshard Street?—The friendly greengrocer's wife—Startlingly sudden appearance of her husband—A black diamond—The first venture from the house-roof—The three half-crowns experiment decided on—The silver bait in the gutter—The lucky fish that found it—The second half-crown, and the man who picked it up—The third—The boy with the birch-broom misses it—Cinderella finds it—Her strange behaviour on the occasion—The adventurers return to the greengrocer's parlour—The extraordinary history of the first half-crown, and what was bought with it, and when and where.

It was a sudden inspiration, cropping out of surroundings as unromantic as can well be imagined. The short and simple facts are as follows. My much-trusted friend, Mr. Almonder, who, at Christmas time, has his hands full of business, called on me to inquire if I could inform him where "Potshard Street, E.," was to be found, his object being there to execute an odd sort of commission on behalf of an unknown philanthropist. He showed me the letter he had received from the individual last mentioned: "Dear Mr. Almonder, I enclose two five-pound notes, which I very earnestly beg of you to distribute, according as you may judge of their necessities, among the poorest of the poor living in Potshard Street, E. It will be an act of charity towards me as well as them if you will kindly oblige me. I made most of my money out of them, and I am afraid that I was hard on them sometimes. It would be a great relief to my mind to know that some of them will enjoy at my expense a few Christmas comforts they could not otherwise obtain." That was all. The eccentric donor had signed the letter with neither name nor initials, or any other token that afforded a clue to his identity. "I wish he had done so," remarked Mr. Almonder, "so that I might have suggested his finding some one to distribute his charity who had some knowledge of the locality and the people he wished to benefit. In the South of London I know every back street, and court, and alley, but of the East I know next to nothing." Though somewhat less benighted as regards the geography of East London, I had but a vague idea where Potshard Street is situated, but rather than the folk living there

should miss the lucky windfall, I agreed to accompany him in search of it, and with that view we set out together.

Between Limehouse and Shadwell we came warm on the scent, and, as good luck ordained, sought for further and final information at a greengrocer's shop. Outside of it, and busily employed weighing potatoes, in the midst of quite a crowd of wretchedly-clad and poverty-pinched women and children customers, was the female proprietor, a middle-aged and matronly female, who, as a protection against the freezing cold, wore over her feminine attire a man's rough pilot jacket, while a cotton handkerchief tied round her hat and under her chin, shielded her ears from the wind. When business had slackened a little with her, we asked her did she know Potshard Street. She promptly gave us the desired information, and then, eyeing Mr. Almonder, and auguring generally from his benevolent aspect, she asked, "Did you want anybody in particular there, sir?" "I can't say that I do," he replied, "unless you are able to inform me at which of the houses the poorest families reside." She was a stout woman, with a coarse, red face, and a voice unmusically hoarse, probably through continuous exposure to inclement weather and the handling of icy-cold vegetables, but the sudden kindling of kindly interest that came into her eyes as she heard Mr. Almonder's answer, betrayed her proper nature and disposition. She was about to say something, but, glancing about her and discovering that the tattered and hungry-looking females who were bent on potato-buying had pricked up their ears, as the saying is, and were furtively regarding us and nudging and whispering, the friendly greengroceress beckoned us into the shop, deputing a boy who was there to attend outside in her stead. "Of course you didn't know it," she remarked, "but while you was asking your question as to the poorest people in Potshard Street you was in the midst of 'em."

"You know something about them, it seems?"

"Well, I was going to say worse luck for us, we do," she answered, with a shrug of her ample shoulders, "but I won't go as far as that. Unless a person's got a heart like a brickbat she can't hear the tales she's obliged to hear without helping them a little, and if it's only a couple or three quarters of a hundred a day—coals, I mean—it tells up. I'm bad enough,

but my husband is such a soft-hearted old stupid—oh, here he is, to speak for himself."

He came seemingly from a cellar under the stairs, and made a startlingly sudden appearance by pushing open a door in the papered wall of the little shop parlour. He did not in the least answer to his wife's description of him. He was a bent-backed, sour-visaged little old fellow, with grey hair grimy with coal dust, and an unclean white woollen comforter wisped round his throat. His voice was gruffer even than that of his good lady, and when in his presence she made mention of the many "quarters of hundreds" he gave away among the impoverished Potsharders, he growlingly replied that it was "a jolly good job too, and much good might it do 'em." But when he heard what Mr. Almonder's errand was, it immediately became apparent that he, like his wife, carried a compassionate heart beneath his rough exterior.

"I tell you what," said he, "if you'll wait while I give myself a sluice, and make myself a bit tidy, I'll come along with you and pint 'em out." And he was as good as his word. With his friendly assistance Mr. Almonder's ten pounds worth of silver judiciously apportioned was soon distributed, the charitable greengrocer generously supplementing the welcome gift with a whole ton of coals, divided on this special occasion into half-hundreds instead of "quarters."

But it was not until this business was accomplished that the affair that afforded me material for the present article claimed our attention. It came about in this wise. In a narrow street leading out of Potshard Street—and, of the two, more squalid and miserable than the latter—the charitable greengrocer owned a house that at present was empty and undergoing repair, and, the door being open, nothing would do but we must go in with him that he might show us how the last ungrateful tenant, who owed him three quarters rent, had not only slipped off without paying but, previous to taking his dishonest departure, had entirely stripped the roof of the lead that was there. But even the melancholy spectacle of the exposed rafters did not lastingly depress his spirits. As we peeped over the parapet of the tall old house down into the street below, he spied a child he knew, a little girl, shoeless

and with bedraggled skirts, who was labouring along with a load in a sack on her small back.

"That's only a bushel of coke she's got there," remarked the charitable greengrocer, "she's been to our place for it. She lives along with her grandmother, little mite, and she's got a sister what goes on crutches. I wonder if I was to shy a penny down if she would find it?"

He tried the experiment on the instant, and we watched the effect. The coin fell within a couple of yards of the child and right in front of her, but it had, unhappily, plunged into the mire, and, almost treading on it, she struggled on with the sack, unconscious of the treasure she had missed.

"That's a pity," growled the gruff greengrocer, "but some of 'em is sure to find it and pick it up, and it don't much matter which 'ave it, although, o' course, it don't follow that the luckiest one is the most deserving or the one most in want." And then it was that the brilliant idea occurred to him.

"I tell you what," he remarked, after a pause, and taking us each by a button of our coats, "what do you say to all three of us pitching down half-a-crown, one at a time, and when nobody's looking, just for to give the unlucky ones who come this way a chance."

Our post of observation was not the most comfortable that could be desired, all unsheltered as it was in the bleak December wind, but there was novelty in the good-natured greengrocer's proposition, and it would have been adopted without further question had it not occurred to Mr. Almonder to improve on it.

"I am willing, on this condition," said he, "that as each half crown is picked up, no matter by whom—though it is pretty well sure to be by someone living in the immediate neighbourhood—the one who throws it agrees to follow the fortunate finder and ascertain, as far as he can, what becomes of the money."

The suggestion instantly found favour with the greengrocer, but I was not disposed to so readily accept it. I objected that once started on such an errand it might take an hour or two to see it through, and an empty house was not a cheerful rendezvous for those who had got through their business first to wait for the other. "There is not the least occasion for

that," said the hospitable coal and potato merchant. "It is twelve o'clock now; suppose we arrange, however we may be separated, to meet in my shop parlour between four and five, when we can have a cup of tea and tell what we've got to tell." And so we all agreed.

Eager for the fray, the greengrocer was the first to launch his "lucky penny," not from the roof, but from a window of the topmost room, to which we descended for the purpose. No one saw it fall, though we could plainly make out the half-crown shining white on the black and muddy pavement. We watched with eager interest, and the greengrocer looked disappointed, not to say disgusted, when we saw the prosperous publican from the public-house at the corner come sauntering along with a big cigar in his mouth and a fancy dog at his heels. And the worst of it was the publican's eyes were so constantly directed towards the ground, looking after the dog, that it seemed next to impossible that he could pass without observing the coin showing so suspiciously in his path.

"Dash it all," murmured the greengrocer, "fancy it falling to his luck. Why, he could cover the pavement from here to his house with half-crowns without ruining himself."

But kind fortune otherwise ordained. Fortunately the publican's "fancy" was not restricted to the canine tribe. He was partial to pigeons as well, and a flight of the birds mentioned being let loose at that moment from one of the house-tops, his gaze was turned skywards, and he had fairly passed the interesting spot ere he looked down again and whistled to the terrier. Next came along a poor woman with a load of newly-made men's jackets. She was in a great hurry, and, from her general appearance, a slop-tailoress taking her work to the warehouse. She was such a deplorable-looking object that I hoped the half-crown would be hers, but her bundle was such a large one that, carrying it clasped in both her arms, she could only look straight before her over the top of it, and so she missed the money.

But the silver bait did not lie much longer unheeded by the hungry fish abounding in the neighbourhood. The slop-tailoress had not passed on more than half a minute when there came along in the middle of the road a lean and gaunt-looking youth of fifteen or thereabouts, ragged as a scarecrow, with

odd boots several sizes too large for him on his feet, and with his towzled hair uncovered with any kind of cap. He wore the collar of his tattered jacket turned up to his ears, and his hands were thrust deep into the pockets of his old trousers as he shuffled along at the dog-trot. It would have been strange indeed had he missed the half-crown, for, with his head down, he was evidently keeping a sharp look-out for anything worth picking up. Though he was in the middle of the road the way was a narrow one, and suddenly, quick as a cat at a mouse, he spied the treasure, and was down on it—literally. The chance of making so tremendous a prize his own seemed for the moment to disturb the balance of his reason, and he flung himself on the money as though a dozen other boys were scrambling for it with him, and he meant making it his own, though they tore the rags off his back in the struggle. Finding, however, that he was in undisputed possession, he slowly rose, and while he looked warily about him, made a feint to rub his nose with his cuff, while he slipped the miry money into his mouth. Then, no longer at a dog-trot, but with the speed of a canine creature who had just made a successful snatch at a butcher's shop, he bolted off.

It was not a promising prospect, but the greengrocer was a man of his word, and, moreover, was on his mettle. Had he been the butcher whose mutton chop the dog had purloined he could not have been more prompt in pursuit. While the fleeing youth was still in sight, the greengrocer was taking the stairs three at a time, and we saw him nimbly emerge from the street door as the former vanished round the corner.

Mr. Almonder's half-crown went next, and he was kept but a short time in suspense. The lucky finder, however, was hardly the sort of person he would have fixed on had he the privilege of choice. He was a man of middle age, and of the shabby-genteel type. His threadbare black coat was buttoned as high as his chin, he wore a tall hat, a black glove on one hand, and from his general appearance he might have been an out-of-work clerk or linendraper's assistant, or, judged by his sharp shoulder bones, his sickly visage, and the white and bony hand that was ungloved, he might have been that morning discharged from some hospital. The half-crown had rolled into the gutter by the side of the pavement. He caught sight of it, paused, looked

back over his shoulder at it, turned about, poked it with his umbrella, and picked it up, making believe that he had stooped to flick a speck of mud off his trouser leg with his loose glove. Watching him narrowly, we saw him furtively try as to the genuineness of the coin by biting it. Then he loitered a few steps, turned back and popped into the side entrance of the public-house at the corner, from which the sporting publican had emerged a few minutes before. It was only a flying visit, however, for, by the time Mr. Almonder had reached the street, he—the shabby-genteel man—was out again, and walking at such an easy pace it was not in the least difficult to keep him well in sight.

Left alone in the empty house, I launched my two-and-six-penny venture, and stood smudging my forehead and the tip of my nose against the grimy window pane, awaiting the result.

I should liked to have looked out of the window, but was afraid of betraying my presence there. The fact was, I was not at all sure as to what had become of the coin I had thrown out. My aim was to lodge it in the middle of the pavement, but it had fallen on its edge and rolled somewhere towards the house wall, or, for all I knew to the contrary, it might have disappeared down the area grating. There seemed to be something amiss with it. Quite a number of people passed to and fro, but no one noticed it. Once I thought it was descried. A ragged boy with a broom came along, delivering himself in spasmodic yelps of "Ho, my little darlin', I loves you," when he came to a sudden halt under my window and stooped down. But I presently found that his object in so doing was merely to possess himself of a portion of a brick to throw at a lame cat on the opposite side of the way, and, having accomplished the feat, he went on his way and with his song.

His tuneful lay was still audible when there hove in sight the very individual who, of all others, I would like to find my half-crown if it was to be found—the little girl who had passed that way previously with the load of coke on her back, and who, according to the charitable greengrocer, lived with her grandmother, and had a sister who went on two crutches. She was carrying something on the present occasion, but it was of small bulk and hidden beneath her pinafore. Would she be the lucky

one? She came to a standstill! But it was only to look up the street and down the street, and then she darted quickly across the road and into a dingy little shop against the door-posts of which hung various articles of second hand male and female apparel. Presently she came out with nothing under her pinafore, but with a few halfpence in her small hand, and which apparently she was thoughtfully pondering over as she came over to my side of the way again. She was so deep in her musing that she was not aware of the kirbing of the pavement, and, stumbling against it, she fell, and I could hear the chink of her pennies on the stone, though the disaster occurred so close to the house that I lost sight of her. I saw her again presently, however, and I hardly knew her, the expression of her face had so changed. She held something tightly clutched in her tiny fist, and as she looked about her, and upward as though with a vague idea that such a splendid windfall must have fallen from the skies, she held her nether lip between her teeth as though by that means only could she prevent herself crying out aloud. Then, with the clenched hand in the bosom of her frock, she ran away, and I went after her.

Punctually at half-past four o'clock I returned to the shop of the charitable greengrocer, and discovered that worthy, as well as Mr. Almonder, already in the parlour. There, too, was the greengrocer's wife, no longer wearing the peajacket, but primly apparelled in plum-coloured French merino, with a gold brooch fastening her neck riband, and she was preparing a fragrant repast of tea and toasted muffins. But the expression on the greengrocer's face did not denote that he had been pleasantly employed since we parted company. I rightly guessed that, being unable to contain it until my arrival, he had already revealed the cause of his anxiety and alarm to his wife and Mr. Almonder, for, as I entered, the former remarked consolingly,

"You may make your mind easy on that score, Joe, old man. Boys is like—what's them snake things in the Sirlogical—boar constructors, ain't they—in the matter of eatin'? They gorge themselves to bustin' pint, and then they curl up and go to sleep. That's what he'll do."

"Well, I only hope you're right, mother," replied the greengrocer, shaking his head dubiously; "but I'll tell you again,

as I told you before, when I last saw him he was sitting on a door-step, with his eyes goggling and gasping for breath."

"Are you speaking of the lad you followed?" I inquired.

"That's the chap, sir," returned the greengrocer; "I never could have supposed that a half-crown would buy such a wariety of wittles. I hain't been home more than twenty minutes, and he was hard at it from within five minutes of his picking it up till I left him. He's over heated hisself, that's what he's done, poor chap. Blowed if I liked leaving him, he looked so much like going off."

"Going off! To where?" asked Mr. Almonder.

"To all to bits," returned the greengrocer seriously. "It was the half-pint of fourpenny he topped up with that did it. If ever a boy looked like an explosion that boy did."

At this stage of the greengrocer's fragmentary revelations it was suggested to him that the story would be more intelligible if he began at the commencement of it; on which after lengthy apology for his irregular proceeding, he took out his pocket-book, and opening it at a certain page, laid it on the table before him.

"I've got it all down," he remarked, "I entered 'em as he eat 'em, so that there might not be any mistake, and we start with roast pork and baked taters, which it was lucky," said the greengrocer, "that they came in his way as quick as they did, or I mightn't have overtaken him with the start he had of me. But I suppose he was so sharpset with hunger, poor lad, that he couldn't pass the shop. That was where I came on him, anyhow, panting for breath, and looking in at the window. He seemed to be kept back by the awful extravagance of it for a moment or two, but the smell of the pork and the stuffing was too much for him, and he went in and ordered a sixpenny plate and two pennorths of baked taters, taking the half-crown out of his mouth, and putting it down on the counter beforehand, so that they might see that he was giving the order in earnest.

"In a matter of ten minutes he had polished it off, and out he came, looking bright and brisk, and as though he meant business of some kind or other. But he hadn't walked quite fifty yards when he began to slacken, and then he came to a standstill, and then back he goes to the cookshop, and this

time he has three pen'orth of pork and one pen'orth of taters, as I could see by the change they gave him out of his shilling. And having put that away, he treated himself to a pen'orth of baked pudding as he came out, to help him along. I suppose, till he was out of danger of being drawn back again It wasn't a bad idea. Eating it slowly, it lasted him until he got fairly out into the Commercial Road, where he bought a basket at a stall for twopence, so that I have no doubt he meant to go in for a little 'stock' of some sort or other to sell again and earn a trifle.

"But that precious cookshop seemed to haunt him. He bought a penny puzzle, as though to take the flavour of roast pork out of his mouth, and check the hankering for more of it."

"I beg pardon," interrupted Mr. Almonder, "what was it he bought?"

"A penny puzzle—a saveloy, that is. But it was of no use. He soon made his way through the back streets to the shop again, and he had another four pen'orth, varying the vegetables this time by making it cabbage, with plenty of pork gravy in it, instead of taters. I'd got down one and ninepence against him by this time, and he had only ninepence left, and now I made sure that he would make haste to Billingsgate, or Duke's Place, or wherever he was going to buy his stock, but he had gone in for wittles to that extent, not being used to it, poor fellow, that they seemed to have got into his head, as well as his stomach, and to make him as reckless as a man who ain't used to it who takes to drinking. Within ten minutes of leaving the roast pork shop he was tossing a tart man, and, unfortunately for him, being lucky, he came away with a lot of puffs and things. I know how much he spent with the tart man, because he called out after him, 'You're a nice 'un to get six-pen'orth for your threepence, and then give over tossing,' so that by this time he was brought down to sixpence. I hoped he'd give in now, but he had gone too far for good resolutions to be of any use to him, and having finished the pastry, meaning to make a regular feast of it, he bought twopenny worth of eating chocolate and a bottle of ginger beer. After which he seemed to come over a bit queer like, and went and sat down. But he roused up again presently, and went and had twopenny

worth of whelks with vinegar at a street stall, and having only a penny left he wound up with half a pint of beer.

"That settled him, gentlemen. He didn't go twenty yards before he came to a anchor on a doorstep, and that's how I left him sitting on the basket he bought, and making such rum faces it was a wonder he did not gather a crowd round him. And I tell you what," continued the greengrocer, "if you two didn't have better luck with your half-crowns than came of mine, we had better have kept the money in our pockets."

MR ALMONDER'S HALF-CROWN AND MINE.

Mr. Almonder's luck—His half-crown is picked up by a dram-drinker—The first drop—The second—The brave push for the pawnbroker's—The failure at the shop threshold—"Just another three-pen'orth"—All gone!—What came of my half-crown—"How shall I spend it?"—Cinderella's bold determination—A glorious surprise for sick grandmother and sister Sal—I surprise Cinderella in the midst of a stew—We hold a council of cookery—I officiate as deputy cook—The triumph—Return of Sal, and the impending banquet.

"FOR my part," remarked Mr. Almonder, "I am sorry to say that I must agree with our friend here when he suggests that we had better have kept our half-crowns in our own possession, or, at all events, relied less on chance and more on our judgment and discrimination in bestowing them. You saw," he continued, addressing me, "how that individual to whose lot my money fell started to spend it?"

"I saw that he went straight to the public-house at the corner immediately afterwards, and his object in doing so might be reasonably assumed," I replied, "though it hardly follows that he broke into the half-crown to pay for what he had to drink."

"He broke into it to the extent of threepence, as I afterwards discovered," returned Mr. Almonder, "and he bought threepen'orth of neat gin with the money. You remember what we said respecting him when we saw him from the window—that he looked like some unfortunate patient prematurely dis-

charged from an hospital? Well, this first act of his on finding himself unexpectedly in possession of means seemed to me to chime not amiss with our supposition. If so, as seedy dress and pinched and threadbare appearance seemed to indicate, I thought to myself, he should have known better than to swallow threepence of his little fortune at a gulp; but, perhaps, poor fellow, he is weak and felt the cold, and it seemed to him that a glass of gin was really the thing to warm him and put a little life in him.

"When I more closely approached him, and was able more distinctly to make out what a poor, spindle-shanked fellow he was, and how wretchedly thin and how indelibly the stamp of unhealthiness seemed to be set on his grey face and his bloodless lips, our conjecture as to his having recently risen from a sick bed became to my mind more and more confirmed, and I was sorry that I had given away all the ten pounds in Potshard Street, and should have been thankful if I had reserved a few shillings for a sad case such as his. But I was pulled up all on a sudden in my commiserative cogitations by the threadbare man turning into the very next public-house we came to. He didn't enter as does an ordinary customer. He paused abruptly at the door of the private bar, peeped through the ground-glass filagree work as though to make sure that no one else was in that compartment, and then, pushing the door only just wide enough open to admit his narrow body, he slipped in, and ere it seemed that he had time enough to give his order to the barmaid, he had slipped out again, and was licking his white lips with evident satisfaction.

"If I still retained any doubt as to the sort of hands into which my half-crown had unhappily fallen, they were dissipated within the next quarter of an hour. He did not make a call at the next public-house, or at the one immediately afterwards arrived at, but as regards the last he seemed sorely tempted. He loitered at the side entrance, and came to the edge of the pavement, and looked this way and that way, with his white hand on his whiter lips, as though innocently pondering how long it would be before the omnibus or tramcar he wanted would pass that way. What he really was doing, however, was screwing up his courage to pass the public-house, and to repress his yearning for another drain for as many minutes as it would

take him to reach the next shop where it might be procured. He was eventually successful, but eager to reward his firmness of resolution and self-control, he walked with extra briskness to the next public, and then he slipped in slyly, as before, and as rapidly glided out again, stealthily, as though he had been robbing the till, and was fearful of being betrayed by the creaking of the door.

"But now it seemed that he had other objects in view than further dram drinking. He adjusted the top button of his napless black coat, and—advised of the desirability of the alteration by a glance in a draper's plate-glass window—changed his hat back to front, drew on his other glove and marched off with the gait of a man of business. It was a long walk, as far, indeed, as the middle of the Mile End Road, and of course we came on several public-houses by the way. But he seemed grimly determined to resist them all, for the present, at all events. I always knew when we were approaching one, even before it appeared in sight, by his crossing to the other side of the road just before, and keeping his face resolutely turned to the shops at that side.

"At last he slackened pace, but it was not at a public-house. It was at a pawnbroker's shop. He had unbuttoned his coat a few minutes previously, to get at an inner pocket, and withdrew something small therefrom, and which now I have no doubt was a pawn ticket. He had it tucked in the palm of his old glove as he looked in at the pawnbroker's window, and seemed to be minutely inspecting, with a view to purchase, a pair of Sèvres vases, marked fifteen guineas, that was there. It was all intelligible enough, however, to a shrewd observer. At some remote or recent date he had pawned something he could sorely spare at this shop, and probably to raise the price of a dram or two of gin, and now he had resolved to avail himself of his lucky find and redeem his mortgaged property. But he dallied with the brave resolution too long. Had he marched straight up the narrow street at the side of the shop and made at once for one of the range of narrow boxes, all would have gone well; but he gave himself too long a time to think about it, and, unfortunately, there was a public-house with a side snuggery labelled 'For gentlemen only' no farther away than next door but one. He wavered so long that his fortitude failed him,

and with a little shake of his head, as though reproaching himself for his foolish weakness of being afraid or ashamed to face a pawnbroker's shopman, he turned away, and gliding in at the snuggery before-mentioned, glided out again immediately afterwards.

"He went straight back to the pawnbroker's, but those precious vases waylaid him again and again. Under cover of critically examining them did he ponder the question, should he or should he not go in, and redeem the flannel waistcoat or shirt, or whatever it might happen to be, and which, supposing the redemption money to be no more than ninepence, would leave him, after he had paid principal and interest, with very little indeed for his other necessities. But he was not long in deciding this time. In less than a minute he shook his head at the vases, as though he had discovered them to be impostors that would not suit him at any price, and marched on directly across the road to 'The Bull and Butcher,' as though he had an appointment there, and was a little afraid he was behind his time. He slipped in, swallowed three pen'orth, and was out again in less time than a moderate drinker would have occupied in taking the 'head' off a pint of ale.

"This was the fifth glass of gin in little more than an hour, but it brought him no nearer intoxication, as betrayed by ordinary symptoms, than when he had drunk but one glass. He walked as steadily, and wore his hat at the same unimpeachable angle, and carried his umbrella in a way that of itself bespoke his perfect sobriety. The only alteration was in his complexion. It seemed to be gradually growing of a dingier grey, while his eyes, that at first were not much more animated than those of a dead codfish, were lit with a dull phosphorescent glow that increased with the quantity of gin he swallowed. He became a most uninteresting subject after he left the pawnbroker's. He still had fifteenpence left, and the wretched dram-drinker's only object seemed to be to eke it out as long as his patience would allow, which, as near as might be judged, was about a quarter of an hour between each fiery dose. He made his way back here in the process, so I suppose he resides in the neighbourhood. At all events he bought his tenth and final three pen'orth of gin at he public-house we saw him first enter, with the greyness of

his face deepened almost to a light lead colour, and his lips as though they had been bleached in some acid, but still master of his legs and firm in his courage. The last I saw of him was as he vanished in at the doorway of a common lodging-house."

As Mr. Almonder brought his dismal narrative to a conclu sion, the greengrocer visibly roused from the state of dejection he had been cast into by his own unsatisfactory experience.

"I made sure," he remarked, "that my half-crown would turn out to be the unluckiest of all three, but, if you, mister, didn't do better with your's than this gentleman did with his I may be able to claim first prize after all."

When, however, I began by making known to the charitable tradesman that the individual whose good fortune it was to pick up the coin I threw from the window, when I was left alone, was a small acquaintance of his, he opened his eyes and hitched his chair closer to the table with suddenly awakened interest; and when I further informed him that it was the little girl whom he had seen with the load of coke on her back, his delight and amazement were betokened by the twinkling of his eyes.

"Missus!" he exclaimed, "there's the sweet little chirrup as sits up aloft for you. Come and sit down and listen old gal."

I commenced by mentioning the circumstance of the child going to the place where the secondhand clothes were hanging at the door.

"That's a 'dolly shop,'" said the greengrocer, "sort of pawnbroker's without a license, where they charge threepence in the shilling per week on what they lend you. The young 'un went there to raise a sixpence, I'll be bound."

"I can tell you all about that," said I; "she did go there to raise sixpence on her grandmother's boots, the poor old lady being at present bed-ridden, and having no use for them; but all they would lend on them was fourpence, and that was the sum she had to provide dinner for the invalid, her sister with the crutches, who goes out to work and earns eightpence a day at the French polishing, and herself." And then I endeavoured to describe to them the child's unspeakable delight and amazement when, having stumbled and scattered her fourpence, there among the commoner coin lay the wonderful half-crown. How

she scampered off with her treasure the reader has already been made aware, and at that point I took up the thread of the narrative.

I had to make haste to overtake her when I had hastened down stairs, and was the more likely to miss her because she made straight for Limehouse Causeway, which is a street marketing place, and at that time in the day thronged with people. When at last, however, I had come nearly up to her, she had not as yet commenced her marketing. She was standing against a lamppost, in full view of a butcher's shop, with her small face still radiant, but puckered with queer perplexity. She still kept her little fist clenched, but from time to time she took a peep at what was within it, and on each occasion seemed inclined to dance for joy; and which, after all, was a pity, inasmuch as it scattered her more sober deliberations, and she had to begin them all over again. She seemed to be making up her mind for a something she was doubtful as to her ability or her right to set about, and it was soon plain that one of the small joints hanging outside the butcher's shop was a feature of her tremendous design. Her gaze was directed towards the hooks where the scrags of mutton were suspended, and at last she ventured to inquire the price.

"Them scrags. Five and a 'arf to you, granny," replied the facetious butcher's boy, "pick any one on 'em."

She shrugged her shoulders at the enormous price, and was turning away, when the young butcher called after her "weigh yer one at five, come." And on these terms she was tempted.

She had no basket with her, and with the "scrag" in her small apron, with the desperation in her face of a person who had now made an irrecoverable step from which there was no retreat, she mixed with the crowd, and paused at the vegetable stalls and purchased onions, and carrots, and turnips, and potatoes, so that the small apron was presently so full and heavy she was afraid to trust the weight to the strings as she held on by the extreme corners, and eased the burden by taking the middle of the bottom hem between her teeth, and then she turned her face homeward.

I had no idea how much she had spent, but she must have dipped deeply into the precious half-crown. The "scrag," at fivepence a pound, alone must have cost at least half as much.

I kept her in sight until she got to the house where she lived. "And a miserable place it is," interrupted the greengrocer; "I know it. They don't pay any rent, that's one good thing. It has been condemned these six months, and nobody lives in it but them and a woodchopper who has the front kitchen." Then that accounts, I suppose, for the fact of the street door standing wide open, I resumed. Such was the case anyhow, and having seen the little creature so far I did not well see how I was to pursue my inquiry any further, and came away. But I could not content myself with letting the matter rest there. In the first place it was barely one o'clock as yet, and I had a good three hours to spare before our appointed time of meeting; and in the next place I felt curious to learn something of how, having achieved her daring act of marketing, the enterprising mite was received by her family. I took a walk of about twenty minutes' duration, and then I returned to the house, and took the liberty of walking in and upstairs. I knew nothing then of the place being almost uninhabited, and concluded that the reason why there was no response to my tapping at the room doors I discovered in my upward progress was that the various lodgers were from home. At last I reached the topmost, floor and applying my knuckles at the door of the back room, it was opened by the mite herself.

She looked smaller than ever, which, I think, was mainly owing to her having on a large bibbed coarse apron—her elder sister's probably—that reached from her chin to her feet.

She was high busy at cooking.

There was a fire in the rusty old grate, which was in such a ruinous condition that the mantel-piece had fallen away from it; and there was a saucepan on the fire, vegetable peelings were strewn over the naked floor (the room had no single article of furniture in it), and she herself was weeping scalding tears over her present occupation of shredding onions. When she opened the door she had an onion in one hand and a knife in the other, and she involuntarily raised both above her shaggy head in amazement and alarm at my appearance. It was plain at a glance that she had the half-crown on her young conscience, and made sure that my visit was in some way due to it. Nor was her fright at all alleviated when I remarked, in what I intended to be a reassuring tone of voice,

"Don't be alarmed, little girl; I wish to speak with your grandmother."

Real tears, instead of the vegetable production, instantly filled her eyes, and, with her face in a pitiful pucker, she dropped the onion and the knife and clasped her small hands imploringly.

"Oh, pray, pray don't, sir!" she exclaimed, in a half whispering voice, at the same time glancing towards the front attic. "Come inside, sir, pray do, please, and I'll tell you all about it." As soon as I had complied, and she had carefully closed the door,

"Was it your money, please, sir?" she tremblingly asked; "did you drop it, please, sir?"

"I certainly did," I replied; "but——"

But she broke in in an agony, but still without raising her voice, "Oh 'struth! and all I got left of it is this here seven-pence-ha'penny," and she took a sixpence and three halfpence tied up in a bit of rag, from her bosom and pressed it on my acceptance.

"I spent all the rest, sir," said she; "but if you wouldn't mind taking the mutton and the taters and the things for the rest of it——"

There was only one way of putting an end to her fears.

"Let me speak," said I. "It was my half-crown, and I freely give it you to do as you please with."

It was worth the half-crown, and cheap at the money, to see the sudden joy that lit her little face. She could not find words to express her gratitude as she wiped her eyes on her apron and shook hands with me.

"And now that is settled," said I, "I should like to see your grandmother, or your sister who goes on crutches will, perhaps, do as well."

"You can't see Sal," she replied, "cos she won't be home till two o'clock, and—and is it very pertikler about seeing grandmother?"

"Would you rather I didn't see her?" I asked.

"'Taint the seeing of her," replied the small cook, with a glance at the bubbling saucepan, "but if her door is opened she's sure to smell it. That's what I'm afraid of."

And then she took me into her confidence, and informed me

that having found the half-crown, she had ventured on the hazardous experiment of preparing a banquet of boiled mutton and turnips "all unbeknown to anybody," and which she designed to have all ready by the time that Sal returned cold and hungry from her half-day's work at French polishing, when she and Sal and her sick grandmother would partake of the unexpected feast. But she had launched on a venture of which she had not foreseen many of the difficulties, prominent amongst which was that she had quite overlooked the fact that the entire family crockery in the way of dinner service consisted of two plates, a cracked baking dish, and a basin, and with such a limited allowance of crockeryware it was impossible to do justice to such a handsome spread as that in preparation. Another thing the anxious young cook was in trouble about. She had but one saucepan. "And," said she, "if I bile my taters along o' the mutton they'll all go to smash 'stead of being dry and mealy, as I should like to see 'em." But we got over these difficulties. She knew where there was a crockery shop, as well as where a saucepan might be purchased, and I agreed to give an eye to the pot on the fire, and to be sure it didn't "gallop," but only gently simmer, while, with her self-possession quite restored, she went off to buy the requisite articles.

By the time she returned with them the mutton was getting towards being done, and after we had tasted the broth and held consultation as to the proper quantity of pepper and salt to add to it, she put the potatoes on to boil in the new saucepan while the three new plates and the two new dishes were warming on the hearth. And just as she tried the potatoes with a fork and pronounced them just done and real beauties, we heard a laboured stumping up the stairs, and the mite, clapping her hands, exclaimed—

"That's Sal! How jolly lucky, just as it's all done to!"

I will not attempt to describe the amazed face of the poor cripple as she stood in the doorway, and gazed, like one who views a scene of enchantment, on me, and on her sister, and on the saucepan and the plates and dishes. This, to me, was the climax of the performance, and the proper time to take my departure. I confess that I should like to have seen the serving up and the astonishment of the bedridden grandmother when her room door was opened, and the savoury steam that

heralded the coming banquet greeted her poor old nose. But perhaps the picture was one better to imagine than to witness, and I came away.

"SCRAG-END" MARKET.

The "impossible" from the statistician's point of view—How it is done—Scrag-end Market on a Saturday night—Liberal-minded sanitary inspectors—The dreadful-looking meat—Leg of mutton at sixpence a pound—Street-corner doctors—Pills three-halfpence a dozen—The "antibilious health restorer"—The toys of Scrag-end Market—"Who'll buy a bedstead for a farden?"—Working models—The slogging stone-breaker—The hard-working cobbler—Mrs. Sudds, the washerwoman—Poverty's playthings.

ONE of the most inexplicable mysteries of modern London is involved in that wonderful domestic economy by the exercise of which poor people contrive to eke out their small means far beyond what, in the opinion of those who have facts and figures at their finger ends, and should therefore know all about it, are the bounds of possibility. Take, for example, the case of an industrious and respectable labouring man whose earnings of twenty-five shillings a week are all he has to depend on to maintain his family, his wife being unable to contribute to the housekeeping fund in consequence of her time being entirely engaged in taking care of her little children. Of the latter, let us say there are six, their ages ranging from one year old to twelve. The man has to pay six shillings a week for two rooms to live in, which leaves him nineteen shillings to meet every other demand made on him. He has to provide sufficient wholesome food for eight persons, to purchase boots and clothes, to pay school fees, to satisfy the claims of the grocer, the cheesemonger, and the coal dealer, and to put by a trifle to square accounts with the doctor.

The matter-of-fact statistician declares, without hesitation, that it is quite impossible to do so much with so little. "My good sir," says the man of knowledge, "it is as easily demonstrable that it cannot be done, as that twice two are unequal to five. The price of every commodity as sold in the cheapest

market may at any time be ascertained by reference to the market reports as published in the daily papers. The Metropolitan Meat Market gives the latest quotation of beef and mutton, pork and veal, of all qualities, from 'prime' to 'inferior.' Spitalfields, Covent Garden, Leadenhall, Mark Lane, each separate market contributes its information, and we are enabled to ascertain at a glance the wholesale cost of a joint of butcher's-meat, a four-pound loaf, or a pound of butter or cheese; and if we are desirous of knowing what is the fair average of the amount of aliment necessary to keep an adult or a child in good health, we have but to consult a poor law or our prison return of these to get tabulated statements the accuracy of which there is no denying. This on the one hand; on the other, we have nineteen shillings to cover the maintenance of a family of eight persons. Eight in nineteen, two and three over. Two and fourpence farthing per week for each individual, or fourpence and a fraction per diem, which is little more than sufficient to provide the youngest child of the family with bare bread and milk. So that the proposition is absurd, and it is mere waste of time to argue it."

And yet, despite this sound and lucid reasoning, the seeming impossibility is achieved in ten thousand instances every week, summer and winter, all the year round, and in our midst. I have given some amount of attention to the puzzling problem, and though I cannot pretend that I have mastered it, it seems to me its key may be sought for in the assumption that the suppositious "man of knowledge" is scarcely so wise as he gives himself credit for being. He lacks practical acquaintance with the habits and customs of those he treats of. He should move among them, and see for himself.

There is a long and sinuous thoroughfare situate in the heart of London-in-the-East, the real name of which will not be here given, but which, probably because of the chronic impecuniosity of those who patronize it as a market-place, is popularly known as "Scrag-end." It flourishes all the week through, but the time to see it at its busiest is Saturday night, when the glaring jets of gas have just been lit to illuminate the butchers' shops, and the countless costermongers have set their naptha lamps blazing. The place is like a fair at such times, as regards the crowding and deafening hubbub. Although the name of the

place in question has been but vaguely intimated, the bold explorer who sets out in search of it cannot well miss it, if he bears in mind the following hint. Let him make a start at the City end of Bishopsgate, and keep straight along, casting an occasional glare skyward and to the right; and when he discovers a broad patch of cloud showing livid, as though it reflected the conflagration of a whole street of houses, he may feel assured that Scrag-end is not far off, and, by joining the throng who are moving in the direction indicated, he will speedily find himself there.

The first amazing discovery that he, the explorer, will make as he pushes his way through the rough-and-ready throng that crowd the roadway and footpaths is, that Scrag-end has a tariff of its own, and as different from that which rules in the more respectable parts of the metropolis as the proverbial "chalk and cheese." But his greatest amazement will be when he notes the prices at which the butchers of Scrag-end ticket their meat. It may be that the appearance of the joints and pieces hanging, like a thick curtain, at some of the shops as high as the first-floor windows, downwards, is not such as to prepossess a fastidious person in their favour. Indeed, I am bound to confess, that such was my own impression, which of course shows how immensely advantageous it is to engage the services of responsible public officials, such as sanitary inspectors, whose duty it is to take care that no food, except that which is quite wholesome, is exhibited for sale. Had I been left to my own ignorant prejudice, I should have felt no hesitation in declaring that a more scandalous and disgusting exhibition of butcher's meat than that on view at several of the shops at Scrag-end was never seen. And not only at shops, but retailed by costermongers on barrows, and on boards, the trestles of which stood in the gutter. There were ribs of mutton that, hanging against a glare of gas or naphtha, showed the light behind as coloured glass does, the shoulders, and legs, and loins, being shrunken and flabby, with lean of the pale pink coral, and fat the yellow of amber. If there was anything more unsightly than the mutton at what may be called the slop-shops of the butcher class, it was the beef and the veal, which I seriously declare that, but for the well-known fact that paid inspectors are always vigilant and on the alert to seize

and condemn unwholesome animal food, wherever it may be offered for sale, I should have come away from Scrag-end Market that Saturday night, convinced that at least half the butcher's meat there exhibited was quite unfit for human consumption.

Possibly the marvellously low prices at which the joints were sold favoured the above-mentioned conclusion. Shoulders of mutton at fivepence a pound, legs at sixpence, ribs of beef at sevenpence, and only another halfpenny for sirloin. A presumably better class of meat was offered at some of the shops at higher prices, but those quoted ruled at the majority of them, and certainly the barrowmen were charging no more—in many instances less—and since several tons weight of meat of the queer-looking quality must be disposed of every market night, and, as far as I know, without alarming results, it must be accepted that it is not prejudicial to health. Indeed, it should, in fairness, be stated that, as compared with everything else on sale in Scrag-end, the butcher's meat was not particularly cheap.

The vegetable interest showed itself to be equally defiant of newspaper market quotations. Potatoes might be purchased at the rate of three pounds for a penny, green peas at threepence the peck, while cabbages seemed to be such a drug in the market that it would have been no great loss to the grower if he had dug them into the land as manure, instead of paying carriage for them to London. No wonder the place is so closely packed with a struggling crowd, and that so many causing it are women, with large marketing baskets bespeaking many little mouths to fill at home. Where else, but at Scrag-end Market, can bread at the present time be bought at fivepence the four-pound loaf, flour at sixpence the quartern, butter-like composition at tenpence the pound, and half the sum last mentioned for cheese and bacon? Nor is it only as regards foods that such amazing cheapness prevails.

A brisk trade is done by the street-corner doctors, of whom I counted five within a space of two hundred yards. If any of the commodities retailed in Scrag-end Market chance to disagree with the purchasers, they can, at all events, be cured inexpensively. Pills are obtainable at three halfpence a dozen, and draughts for indigestion—not the insignificant siplets such

as the ordinary chemist dispenses, but a fair half-pint, for four doses, for the sum of sixpence. Nor does the street doctor foist his curatives on his customers without a why and a wherefore. There was one who showed himself curiously learned as regards the human liver. He had highly-coloured drawings and diagrams of that most eccentric organ, and thrilled his hearers with horror by minutely describing the ghastly results attending any impediment of the bile duct. Threepence was the price of a bottle of his renowned anti-bilious health restorer, and if a person made the profitable investment, his personal appearance would be straightway improved—as thus: and he held up to public view the portrait of a florid and handsome gentleman, with luxuriant hair and whiskers. If, on the contrary, one neglected the golden opportunity, this probably would be his fate: and up went the picture of a wretched-looking, jaundiced invalid, with no hair on his head to speak of, and with hollow, whiskerless cheeks; and, impressed with the folly of running such a fearful risk when, with so small an outlay, it might be avoided, there immediately ensued a brisk exchange of threepences for bottles of the medicine.

There is, however, one conspicuous feature of Scrag-end that, for more reasons than can be readily reckoned, brings to the beholder a feeling of satisfaction and relief. Its presence seems somehow to lighten the oppressiveness of the atmosphere of the place, in a moral sense, inasmuch as it undeniably bears witness that the poorest of the poor, upon whom the burden of a large family must press with crushing weight, are not forgetful of the claims of the children, and cheerfully spare a mite from their small means to provide for their amusement. There was never such a place as Scrag-end for toys, and if there is anything in connection with them that excites more amazement than their curious variety, it is how the majority of those who sell them contrive to make a living on their profits. As a rule, the toys in question are of a kind such as are never sold in shops. They are vended by gutter-hucksters, whose stock is commonly contained in a broad wooden tray slung from the neck with a string or strap.

A common price for many of the toys is a farthing each, and as regards the smaller sort, such as whistles, and watches, and

popguns, occupying but little space, the stock exhibited might be worth several shillings; but the articles at the low price mentioned are not all of the tiny sort. You may buy a doll's bedstead of the old-fashioned wooden four-poster shape, or a windmill, or a jumping jack-in-the-box, for a farthing; and as many such bulky things as a tray will hold, though piled so high that the seller can barely peep over them, would represent scarcely eighteenpence. That sum would purchase seventy-two four-posters, be it remembered—seventy-two separate sales being presumedly necessary to dispose of the stock, since no child with a doll would require two bedsteads for it. The gross taking, after all, is one shilling and sixpence. I saw an old fellow with a trayfull of bedsteads at the corner of a street as I passed through the crowded lane at seven o'clock in the evening, and at halfpast eleven, returning the same way, he had as many of the articles left as would have furnished an extensive dormitory of a dolls' hospital, and he was still bawling out, just as I had heard him four and a half hours previously, "Who'll buy a bedstead? Who'll have a bedstead for a farden?" I spoke to him on the subject of the business, expecting to hear a doleful account of its slackness. But the poor old chap seemed very well satisfied. He had sold four dozen and nine, he told me, and hoped to get rid of at least three more, "which will be as good as fifteen pence," said he, rubbing his hands cheerily.

"I shall have to knock off presently, though," he continued, "or I shall have the best of the butcher's shops shut up, and me and my old woman like a bit of something nice for Sunday's dinner when we can afford it."

"Now, out of the fifteen pence, how much is clear profit?" I asked him.

"Oh, it's all profit if it comes to that, 'cept the wood and the glue," he replied. "My old woman, she makes 'em, and I sell 'em, and there being only us two, we do pretty well. I mean with my son's help, of course. You know my son, perhaps, leastways no doubt you've seen him. He's the blind man that sells cigar lights and shoe-laces out here and in Holborn. He's a good son, sir. He allows us two-and-threepence a week to pay our rent, which is as good as three shillings a week almost, for he always comes to dinner at

our place on a Sunday, and pays ninepence for it, when his appetite isn't ekal to eating more than three penn'orth at best of times. But, 'twixt you and me," said the old man, with a wink, and lowering his voice as though it was possible that the individual he was speaking of might overhear him, "I believe he's that kind-hearted, he conwenientcies his eating to how much there is to eat."

But they are not all farthing toys that are on sale amongst the crowd that so thickly throng Scrag-end on a Saturday night after the gas is lit. If the purchaser chooses to go as high as a halfpenny, he can have his money's worth, or he is hard indeed to satisfy. A toy mangle may be bought for the sum mentioned, or a Dutch clock with weights and pendulum, or a deal table and half a dozen chairs. But the most popular toys of the halfpenny sort are the "working models," made of highly painted cardboard, and manipulated by means of a string attached behind. There is the "Slogging Stone-breaker" and the "Hardworking Cobbler," and "Mrs. Sudds, the Washerwoman," and "Sayers and Heenan." Indeed, it is a peculiar, and not, perhaps, pleasant fact in connection with what may be called the plaything department of the commerce of Scrag-end, that a large proportion of the toys are intended seemingly at once to amuse and familiarise the infant mind with the stern realities of life, and with what probably will be its own fate in future years. Were such not the purpose in view, there is no reason, for example, why the "Hard-working Cobbler" should not be a comical figure. On the contrary, it is grimly true to life. The vendor of shoes squats down at his work, and when the string that moves his limbs is pulled, with outstretched arms he tugs at the waxed threads until his eyes, which are moveable, squint hideously with the strain. Moreover, he is a wretchedly clad cobbler, with a torn shirt, revealing a naked shoulder, and his toes are peeping out of his dilapidated boots.

The same principle is adhered to in the working model representing "Mrs. Sudds, the Washerwoman." Her hair is dishevelled with the violence of her movements, and great beads of perspiration are depicted dripping from her brow, but, to console and comfort her, the artist has painted a black bottle conspicuously labelled "gin," and which is placed within

easy reach of her hand. It seemed to me, however, that the working model representing the pugilistic encounter of Sayers and Heenan found the readiest sale. Indeed it was the one the seller manipulated as a sample, pulling the strings and suiting the word to the action, to the immense delight of the juvenile crew of ragamuffins gathered about him.

"Here you are, my kiddies! ony a 'apenny, the great set-to between the Benisher Boy and Tom Sayers. Go it, Heenan! Hah, Tom, my boy, you caught a nasty one on the tater-trap! But Tom's alive, my lads, but Tom is up to his work. Ah! I told you so. There's one for you, Heenan, my buck, right into the breadbasket."

Whereat the budding Scrag-enders, eagerly looking on, grinned with glee, and instinctively clenched their little fists, and bobbed back, and winced just as Mr. Heenan did when he received punishment. It was evident that they caught the spirit of the thing and enjoyed it, as, perhaps, was but natural, considering their surroundings and their daily experiences. But it is far from being as easy to understand how any child, however mean its social position, can take solitary delight—for they are not toys that two or more children can play with at one and the same time—in turning a mangle, or in making a ragged cobbler strain at his work till his eyes seem to start from his head. One would think it would in time become monotonous, even to pull at a string for the pleasure of seeing a stone-breaker jerk his hammer on a painted granite heap, or a poor washerwoman slave at the tub until her hair tumbles down over her face.

But the peculiarity of the toys of Scrag-end seems to be that they shall all be more or less of a practical and common-place character, and such as shall not by an affectation of superiority or gentility offend the tastes of those who are expected to buy them. This is particularly the case as regards the Scrag-end dolls. It is well-known that within the past twenty years a marked improvement has taken place in this class of child's toys. Skilfully moulded little effigies in wax or composition, tastefully attired, take the place of the monstrosities that used to do duty as "dollies." But the improvement has not been adopted by those who affect the Scrag-end Market. With few exceptions the dolls I saw for sale there were of the old-fashioned, wooden-headed type, with impracticable splint-wood

arms and legs, hideous as regards expression and countenance as a Polynesian idol, and with a tuft of tow for hair, and clad, as a rule, in a single garment of coloured calico, nailed on behind with tin tacks. I spoke to a woman who had a basketful, the selling price of which was a penny each, and asked her if she didn't think that a prettier sort of doll, and more naturally dressed, would command a readier sale at a price that would yield a profit. Her answer revealed a marvel of Scrag-end more amazing than any I had yet discovered. It is not, if the old woman's word may be taken for it, because the inhabitants are not as yet sufficiently cultivated that they abstain from putting the tastefully-dressed waxen image in the hands of their children. They object on moral grounds. "They prefer 'em plain, and I don't blame 'em," said the old woman, "unless you've got nothing else to do but to look after 'em. Gals in these times learn fashionableness quite soon enough without sticking a flashy-dressed doll in their hands, for them to grow up and take copy from." I laughed at the moment, but when I had made my way out into the main thoroughfare—it was now past twelve o'clock—and noted more than one poor creature sauntering in her flaunting finery, it occurred to me that there might, perhaps, be more in the old doll-woman's remark than at first appeared.

AT THE FORTUNE-TELLER'S.

Mr. Mobbs' place of business—The old lady of the wardrobe shop—The little back room on the stairs—Waiting for Mobbs—His arrival, and his first client—The cards, the "cut," and the catastrophe—"Your favourite colour is red, but you will never marry a soldier"—A married woman customer—A good half-crown's worth—Aspirants for Cupid's garden—The lady who wanted her "grativity" cast—The looking-glass of fate—The stout customer thanks her lucky stars.

How I contrived to establish friendly relations with Mr. Mobbs I am not at liberty to do more than hint at.

It *may* happen that I am acquainted with a superannuated police official who has seen service in the district in which the

fortune-teller resides, and he, being apprised by me that I should like to learn something concerning the art and mystery of fortune-telling, may have replied, "I can manage it for you. The very fellow for your money lives in Little Blank Street, So-and-So Road. He knows me. I will send him word of what you require, and I don't think he will feel it worth his while to refuse." And this may have led to my waiting on Mr. Mobbs, and to his agreeing with pretended alacrity and cheerfulness, but with ill-concealed disgust, to fall in with my official friend's suggestions. Mr. Mobbs' remark on the occasion may have been "All right. He says that you want to see a bit of my business without being yourself seen. You've no occasion to tell me that no harm will come of it; *he* tells me so, and that's enough. You be at the shop next Saturday evening at six, and ask for me, and I'll manage it somehow or other." It may have happened in this way, I repeat, but for the sake of all parties concerned I do not pledge myself to it. Anyhow, on a certain Saturday evening I was at the appointed place.

The locality a back street, adjacent to a busy market street, less than a mile from the Houses of Parliament; the premises, those of an unlicensed pawnbroker, who pursued a flourishing business under cover of being a dealer in ladies' and gentlemen's wardrobes. The last-mentioned false pretence was countenanced by an exhibition at the shop door of a few flimsy skirts and an article or two of threadbare male attire; while in the shop window were displayed a heap of boots and shoes and a jumble of female finery, including secondhand hats and bonnets, and laces and ribbons, and old gloves.

It was dusk when I entered the dingy little place.

I was expected.

A female who superintended the pawnbroking department was at home, and, emerging from the back parlour, she gave me a nod of recognition and a look of enjoining stealth and caution, raised the flap in the counter, and gave me admittance. Taking a look round to make sure that no one was watching, she led the way up stairs with a noiseless tread, and presently, opening the door of a back room, beckoned me to enter. She was a very old woman, blear-eyed, and with quite a thick moustache, and this was a bed-room, as a little iron bedstead in a corner and gowns hanging on hooks attested. There was

a window in the wall that separated the front room from the back, and on one side of the window a frowsy green muslin curtain, too thick to be seen through. A pane of the glass had been broken, and was plastered over with a piece of thin paper.

"It is Mr. Mobbs' arrangement," remarked the old lady. "When you want to come out, knock three times with your stick on the floor."

And thus it came about, to return to my starting-point, that there I was, with nothing to prevent my being an eye and an ear witness to all that might take place within the next hour or so in the adjoining apartment, which was the consulting room of old Mr. Mobbs, the fortune-teller—or, I should add, his name might have been Mobbs if it was not. If the reader does not mind, I feel sure that that modest soothsayer himself does not. Indeed, for obvious reasons, not only will he pardon all ambiguity and purposeful errors of description, but be much obliged to me for the same, for, albeit a popular practitioner, he is well known to the police, and on more than one occasion he has been in trouble. But such is Mr. Mobbs' affection for his profession, and his desire to benefit his fellow-creatures by means of the marvellous gifts he is possessed of, that he courageously braves all consequences, and is still much resorted to by a credulous public.

I was not surprised to hear that his clients were chiefly of the female-servant class, curious concerning their sweethearting prospects, and that Mr. Mobbs did a profitable stroke of business, in his own immediate neighbourhood, amongst married and single ladies; but I was somewhat astonished when I was further informed by the unexceptionable authority already quoted that even middle-aged men of costermongering pursuits had faith in him, and would pay him stealthy visits, and give him sixpence to induce him so to "work the oracle" as to be able to inform them as to a probable change of the wind, and whether there was a prospect of plenty of fishing vessels at Billingsgate next morning. This seemed hardly credible; but when I was further informed that such was Mr. Mobbs' known ability as a vaticinator that even betting-men of horsey proclivities had come there shamefaced and disguised, preferring Mr. Mobbs' "tip" for the Leger or the Derby to that of the

professional newspaper prophet, I was more than ever anxious to keep my appointment with him.

I presume that Mr. Mobbs selected Saturday evening, as being his busiest time. He did not reside permanently on the premises; he had his stated hours of daily business, and on Saturday evenings he was to be found at home from six until half-past ten. Punctual to the moment almost, he ascended the stairs and turned the key in the door of his sanctum; but beyond approaching the curtained window, and giving me a friendly nod, he took no notice of me. He is a short and somewhat thick-set man of middle age, quick-eyed, and full of business briskness, and with a bolt upright head of short hair that forcibly reminded me of Mr. Pancks of "Little Dorrit" notoriety. He whistled softly but cheerfully, and, as a man on quite good terms with himself, while he proceeded to perfect his little arrangements, which were soon completed. He ranged on the table three packs of ordinary playing-cards, a box with a spy-hole in front and a curtain at the back of it something like that used by photographers, and a revolving globe of the planetary system. From the same cupboard he produced a strange-looking dressing-gown of thick stuff, the ground colour of which was sea-green, fantastically ornamented with the signs of the Zodiac; and when he had completely enveloped himself in this, and put on a pair of spectacles of the largest size, his bristly hair seemed to bristle still more, and he appeared not the same commonplace person who had entered the chamber a few minutes before. He drew down the blinds and lit his lamp, and barely had done so when he cried "Come in," in response to a tap at his door.

A young woman—a mere girl, indeed, of sixteen or thereabout—fairly good-looking, and of the hard-working class, as was betrayed by the coarse apron caught up and rolled round her waist, which her shawl did not quite conceal, entered the room.

She came in bold enough, but, feeling herself alone, confronting the spiky-haired one with the lamp shining on his great spectacles and on his diabolical dressing-gown, she reddened and looked nervous, and I think would have backed out of the room again had not Mr. Mobbs, without a word, pointed to one of the packs of cards on the table.

"Cut," said Mr. Mobbs; and shyly she lifted a few of the top cards, and laid them face upward on the table.

Then Mr. Mobbs cut, and the customer cut again. The Queen of Hearts, the King of Spades, and the Knave of Clubs were the three cards exposed. Then the pack was shuffled and cut again, the result being two hearts and a club; and still once more, when there appeared two clubs and a heart.

"They won't take any denial, you see," remarked Mr. Mobbs, looking as pleasant as was possible through his dreadful goggles. "They will have it so, and you can't alter it if you stick out against it till doomsday."

"What is it they will have, sir?" she asked nervously.

"They will have their way. Lay your finger on your favourite colour."

The girl touched the seven of hearts without any hesitation.

"Your favourite colour is red, and you can't deny it," said Mr. Mobbs, fixing her with the spectacles.

Judging from the hue that suffused her face, there was no use in denying it. She made an attempt at doing so, however.

"Well, I don't know. To be sure, he—I mean—no, I ain't sure it's his colour that I like particularly."

Mr. Mobbs shook his head gravely.

"You may deceive me, but you can't deceive the cards," he remarked, "and the cards say you will never be a soldier's wife."

"Well, if it comes to that, he ain't a common soldier," protested the client.

"He may be a corporal or he may be a sergeant," continued Mr. Mobbs, affecting not to have noticed the interruption; "the cards say he is not for you. He is not good enough, and it will never be."

There was a pause, and Mr. Mobbs put the cards together, as though it was all over.

"But that isn't all, is it?" the girl asked; "if he isn't good enough, what then?"

"If I look at your hand it will be another sixpence; please yourself," said Mr. Mobbs.

The young woman pleased herself by holding out her hand

immediately. The fortune-teller brought his glasses to bear on the lines of the corny palm by the light of the lamp.

"It is as plain as daylight," said he.

"What is?" she asked anxiously.

"*That you'll marry the other one*," returned Mr. Mobbs, impressively. "That'll be a shilling, altogether."

The young woman was so taken aback by this startling revelation that the hand with which she sought her pocket paused midway, and she regarded him with wide-open eyes, though it struck me that the expression on her face was rather of satisfaction than otherwise.

"I can't believe it," she presently ejaculated; "why, I havn't known him—the other one I mean—more than a fortnight, and I've kept company with the other months and months."

"You have heard what I said," replied the fortune-teller, with dignity. "The cards when read aright are never wrong. You have had proof of that. How is it they knew that the young man you have been keeping company with is in the army?"

"That's true enough."

"And how is it they knew there was another who was not a soldier, but a civilian? If they knew one thing, why not another? It is nothing to me. The cards make the revelations, I speak for them. One shilling, please."

And so well convinced was the young woman by the last argument that she paid the money without a word, and took her departure, her expression of countenance denoting, unless I am much mistaken, that in the conflict between the soldier and the "other one," the probabilities were that the man of war would be vanquished.

The time occupied in telling the fortune of Mr. Mobbs' first customer was under six minutes, and the promptitude with which Customer Number Two made her appearance after Number One disappeared indicated that she had been in waiting below. She, too, was a young woman, but respectably attired, and she kept her veil down, and the hand she held out for the fortune-teller's inspection bore a wedding ring. She spoke so low that what she said to Mr. Mobbs was inaudible to me, but after the worthy last-mentioned had played a little game of hocus-pocus with the cards he remarked to her,

"You are not happy" (she shook her head), "and the cause of your unhappiness is your present husband. You were under the influence of your evil star when you married him, but you will not much longer remain miserable. Your passage to happiness will be bitter, though brief, and you will marry again, go abroad, and have several children. But of all things beware of a man with brown hair and beard."

The woman turned such a sudden look on him that the veil could not quite conceal the eagerness of her eyes.

"*Very* brown hair?" she asked.

"Almost inclined to black," returned the necromancer solemnly.

"Thank you," said she, and flung half-a-crown on the table. She took her leave as hurriedly as though she deemed it necessary to "beware" of that Marplot with very dark hair without delay.

A person of some education, by her manner and tone, what could have tempted her to come and see Mr. Mobbs? Had she heard what she expected to hear, and taken it to heart in sober seriousness, or was it merely a "little bit" of thoughtless folly on her part? The latter, it is to be hoped, or it might be bad for the present husband, whose misfortune it was to marry a woman possessed of an "evil star." When would its malignant influence be quenched? And what part might it possibly play in the present husband's "bitter, though brief, passage" to future happiness, or to a future state of existence at all events? Further reflection, however, was nipped in the bud, for, with Jack-in-the-box rapidity, up came another customer.

Not a remarkable one. Another silly young woman, wishful to walk in the pleasant ways of sweethearting, in that Cupid's Garden to which, like the old-fashioned suburban tea-garden, "no lady is admitted unaccompanied by a gentleman," and anxious as to the why and the wherefore of her being kept outside. Mr. Mobbs was equal to the occasion, and gave much comfort for the sixpence he charged, although he promised nothing positively. Within the next moon she was to look out for a dark man, not very young, and possibly a widower without encumbrance, and who had plenty of means, and would make her a good husband. When met, he would probably be coming over a bridge from the south to the east. The fourth, fifth,

sixth, and seventh customers were pretty much the same, and as neither paid more than sixpence, in the brief intervals of business Mr. Mobbs pulled open the little drawer where he kept his money, counted it, and scratched his bristly head in a dissatisfied manner. Here was more than three-quarters of an hour gone, and only six shillings taken! But another good customer was on the way.

A stout customer and one that made the banisters of the narrow stairs creak as she hauled herself up by them a step at a time, and wheezed and panted so audibly that, after peeping through a crack in the room door, Mr. Mobbs went out on the landing.

He seemed to be afraid that she would stick fast when she tried to turn the angle of the ascent, and possibly put an end to business for the remainder of the evening.

"What's the matter, my good woman?" he called out. "You'd best not come up here."

"It's all right, sir," gasped the stout lady; "it's—it's more my wind than my size prewents me. I want my grativity cast."

Mr. Mobbs knew what she meant in a moment. This was a job of price.

He descended a few stairs, and lent a hand to haul her up.

From my restricted observatory I did not get a glimpse of her until she was fairly within the room, and from the fuss she made, I expected to find her bulkier. She was a large woman, however, and weighed, I daresay, fourteen stone, with a face round as a pancake, and not unlike that product of the frying-pan as regards complexion. She was probably five-and-forty, blouzily attired, and with a thick plain gold ring and keeper on her marriage finger.

"You cast 'em, don't you?" was her first observation to the fortune-teller, as soon as she could command breath sufficient.

"I can make known to you your horoscope, madam, if that is what you mean," returned Mr. Mobbs stiffly.

"You are very kind," said the stout lady, "but I think I'd rather have t'other done, if you wouldn't mind; you *do* cast 'em, don't you?"

"Can I cast your nativity, do you mean? I can. My fee is five shillings, madam. Have you the particulars—the day and hour of your birth?"

But the stout lady shook her head.

"I can give you where I was christened," she replied. "I can't go backerder than that."

"Then I can't reveal your horoscope, or its meaning, madam," said Mr. Mobbs; "it's quite impossible."

The stout lady looked the picture of vexation.

"Well, I *am* disappointed," she remarked. "Can't you do nothing for me then? Something more than telling my fortune with the cards, I mean."

"Undoubtedly, madam, I can enlighten you as to all that pertains to the future," returned the cool impostor, "by means of the looking-glass of fate," and he laid his hand as he spoke on the spy-glass box with the curtain at the back of it. "What is it you want to know?"

"Well, you are a man of business, and I'm a woman of business; and I don't mind telling you," said the stout lady, sinking her voice confidentially. "I am a widow, and I wish to learn if I shall marry again, and if so, who I shall have? There's three of 'em that makes themselves agreeable; and I wish to know which one, because it will look so foolish to go on encouraging one more'n the others, and be wrong, after all. I've heard about your magic glass, and I want you to show me the right one in it—the right one of the three."

A less acute man than Mr. Mobbs might have felt himself cornered by such a direct demand on his resources, but he was equal to it.

"But supposing, madam, it is decreed by fate that neither of the three is destined to be your next husband" ("Oh, I ain't a-going to suppose anything of *that* kind," put in the widow with determination), "but that someone handsomer and richer," continued Mr. Mobbs, "is in store for you."

"Ah, that, indeed," said the widow, beaming again. "In that case I should like to see him."

"You *shall* see him," replied Mr. Mobbs. "Did I understand you to say, madam, that your late husband was a fair man?"

"He may have been when he was young, but I never knowed

him anything but grey—never," said the lady, with a sigh. "I'm only a young woman now, in a manner of speaking."

And Mr. Mobbs having thus obtained a clue to his customer's wishes, proceeded to arrange his looking-glass of fate. He placed his head in at the back curtains, and seemed to be polishing something with his pocket-handkerchief, and then he turned the box, so that the light of the lamp shone on the disc of glass at the further end. Then he invited the widow to put her head in at the space the curtain covered, and as soon as she complied, and she could no longer see what he was doing, he took from a drawer a small hand mirror and the coloured likeness of a man painted on a card.

"Can you see anything yet, madam?" he inquired.

"No, the glass at t'other end is quite blank," replied the anxious widow's muffled voice.

"Shut your eyes and repeat after me, 'Be he handsome or be he ugly, let him appear,'" said Mr. Mobbs. "Shut your eyes quite tight."

And, as she solemnly recited the incantation, Mr. Mobbs so arranged the hand-mirror and the portrait that the latter was reflected on the glass disc.

"Now open your eyes," exclaimed the conjuror.

A prolonged "O-o-oh!" proclaimed the widow's ecstasy, and she presently withdrew from the curtain a face glowing with satisfaction, and made an effort to shake hands with Mr. Mobbs, who had to drop the "portrait of a gentleman" he still held before he could comply.

"Are you sure—are you certain sure of it?" she asked him.

"The looking-glass of fate says it, and so it will be," he replied gravely.

The lady looked wistfully at the box, and seemed disposed to put her head in again once more; but Mr. Mobbs told her that the image never appeared but once.

"But can't you give me any idea of when I am likely to see him for the first time?" she asked him coaxingly.

He shook his head.

"Or where? In the street or in any building?"

"Such knowledge of the future may be obtained, but it will be a work of time and trouble. And it will be expensive,"

returned Mr. Mobbs, solemnly. "Give me a week, and I will work it out for you."

"How much will it be?"

"I couldn't charge you less than a sovereign. It will cost that in time and materials to work it with," replied Mr. Mobbs, after a few seconds of mental calculation.

"I'll call in a week punctual," said the stout widow promptly. "And how much have I to pay you now?"

"Only five shillings now," said the fortune-teller.

She would have given him ten freely if he had demanded it, and I wonder he did not. But he knew his trade better than I could teach it him, and no doubt he had a shrewd eye to future diggings into that same purse. She shook hands with him again, and went off mightily pleased, and Mr. Mobbs grinned as he first consulted his watch, and then looked into the till and found eleven shillings there; and, after all, only an hour and ten minutes had elapsed since he began.

But by this time I had enough of the little stuffy back room, and when his next customer was closeted with him, without troubling to bid Mr. Mobbs goodbye, I tapped on the floor three times with my stick, and, true to her promise, the old woman of the wardrobe-shop below came up and released me, and I was glad enough to get into the street.

SHADOWS ON THE BLIND.

Over the house-tops—Level with the "line"—A queer galanty show—The bird-cobbler—Sitting up for father—A kick or a kiss—A horrible shadowing—Drowning a woman in a washing-tub!—Awful murder witnessed by a railway signal-man—Idol worship in Bethnal Green—My little cripple's window, a recollection of the summer—The "hooray," and the waving of the night-cap—Where is he now?—The shadow that was like a coffin on trestles—The dismal illusion dispelled.

THE observant traveller who journeys by railway from Fenchurch Street to Poplar will discover nothing very pleasant to contemplate, whichever side of the carriage he may look out. He may see all that is to be seen, and a great deal more, as regards the domestic economy and the private affairs of the inhabitants of the locality, than a proper regard for the privacy of an Englishman's hearth and home would justify, but a great railway company cannot afford to be squeamish in such matters. It may not be nice for one to have a line of railway near at hand, and so nearly on a level with the chimney pots that passing passengers have an uninterrupted view in at all the windows, but it was found that it would be cheaper and more convenient to perch the line at that height, and there was no more to be said about it. If the poor people hiving thickly as bees almost in the houses of the squalid streets that abound on the route in question had an objection to being "overlooked" from top bedroom to back kitchens, they were not compelled to stay there. They might go somewhere else—to Jericho, for all that it concerned the company. But so long as they remained there, grumble as they might, they would have to put up with it.

And if there is any one thing more than another an English man or woman resents, no matter how humble their station, it is to have their home affairs exposed to prying eyes. They can bear with all manner of shifts and contrivances, but it must be in secret, and unknown even to their nearest neighbours, though they may be perfectly well aware that with but little variation the same sort of manœuvering is practised by

them all. And this is particularly the case with poor folks who work for a living at home, as do thousands in the district alluded to. As a rule, they have only the one room, and be their occupation what it may—slop-tailoring, shoe-cobbling, matchbox-making, the manufacturing of kites, of "air-balls," of dolls'-house furniture, the sewing of corn or coal sacks, or the making of paper bags—there they are, the workers and the children who are too young to work, higgledy-piggledy, the bedstead serving as a work-bench and the only table being otherwise engaged, squatted on the floor at dinner or tea—a picnic party without the green grass and the leafy tree, but shut in with frowsy walls and a grimy ceiling instead. But no matter, so they are shut in. Hundreds of the tenements overlooked from the tall railway in question have not the much-prized privilege, and it must be a relief to those who live there when evening comes and they may pull down the window blind.

Window blinds, however, such as are common to poor neighbourhoods, are not "shutters." They merely screen the transparent glass of the windows, and after dark, if there is the light of a lamp or candle in the room beyond, every object that comes between it and the pendant calico is of course reflected thereon. The backs of the long streets of houses that here and there abut on the line of railway present, for the above-mentioned reason, and when viewed after nightfall, a series of quaint pictures, that are all the more puzzling because it is little more than a momentary glance a person seated in a quickly-moving train can catch of them. Sometimes the reflection of what is going on in the room beyond is a tolerably faithful one; but more frequently it is no more than an uncertain clue, a vague hint that is afforded, and which the observer may correctly construe or otherwise, as may happen. In rapid succession ensue the scenes of the strange galanty show. Now reflection takes the queer shape of a monstrous bird, high-shouldered, and with an enormous head, who seems to be tethered to the ground, and is striving its hardest to break away by extending and fluttering its attenuated wings. It is not a creature of the feathered tribe, however, but an industrious cobbler sewing a patch on an upper leather, and what the mendacious blind would make believe are wings are

simply the cobbler's arms going to and fro as he tugs at his waxed ends.

Again, it is the reflection of an individual who no doubt is in reality pursuing an ordinary industry, but the shadow on the blind insists that he is practising feats of conjuring with what appear to be cannon balls, spinning them in the air, and keeping them in motion seemingly by striking at their sides with the flat of his hands. Whisk! and now it is a woman hugging and rocking a baby, which instantly vanishes in favour of another woman, who, to judge from the reflected shadow, is bending over the fire with her arms folded and her feet on the fender. Possibly she is waiting for her late-working husband, whose supper, may be, is simmering comfortably on the hob. Or, perhaps—for it is a neighbourhood where such things frequently occur—she is sitting up for her brutal spouse, whose familiar haunt is the tavern bar, and when he chooses, or when—it being closing time—he is turned out of the public-house, he will stagger home, too drunk, let us hope, since drunk he must be, to hurt her very much when he wildly lunges at her with his coward fist, or raises his unsteady foot to make a kick at her.

Next comes a group representing an acted charade that a family man may guess at a glance. There are four or five small heads grouped together, and as many hands expectantly extended, and in the centre there is a larger figure handling something bulky, and the size of which she is speedily reducing with a weapon that, exaggerated by reflection, looks as large as Blue Beard's scimitar. When she detaches a portion she stabs it with the blade, and holds it towards an outstretched hand, which eagerly closes on it, and proceeds to deposit it in a wide opening which at the same moment appears at the head's lower part. A puzzling picture enough when the key of it is wanting, but quite commonplace when it is explained. It is supper time, simply, and the ceremony in progress is the distribution of the loaf.

On again for a hundred yards or more, with nothing to be seen that is worth mentioning, and then a something that is so startling and inexplicable that, had I been allowed to do so, I would willingly have sacrificed the money I paid for my journey to its end for the privilege of alighting there and

then and satisfying myself as to what the shadows on that particular window blind owed their origin to. As there depicted the business behind seemed wonderfully like cold-blooded and diabolical murder. There were three women—there was no mistake as to their sex, for the hair of each hung in witch-like disorder about her shoulders—and if one might believe in the evidence of his eyesight, they were engaged in drowning a fourth woman in a huge washing-tub. As the reflection on the blind revealed, the wretched victim struggled desperately to make her escape. She seemed to be clasping her hands beseechingly to each one in succession, and then, finding her appeals useless, she stooped, and lowering her head—or the shadow differed widely from the substance—endeavoured to "butt" them with all her might. But the hags were not to be defeated. Each was armed with what resembled an ordinary pair of tongs with which they checked these last-mentioned attacks—poking her in the ribs and forcing her down into the water.

Possibly the real performance was a very harmless one. I relate all that I saw of it, and can say no more. And if I have furnished a clue to a terrible Bethnal Green mystery, I sincerely hope that the police authorities will trace it home to the guilty parties. At the same time I should be sorry to instigate a wild-goose chase. If I rightly remember, it was from this very line of railway—or, at all events, one penetrating the East of London—that what appeared to be a frightful tragedy was witnessed by a signalman on duty in his box.

The window of the edifice in question commanded a view of the low-lying neighbourhood, and one evening—soon after the signalman had lit his gas—looking out he was horrified to see assassination being committed in a stable situated in a yard within a stone's throw of the spot where he stood. The stable in question was to the railway man a familiar feature in the surrounding scenery, and always before he had noticed that the window, or rather window-hole, was unglazed, and protected in no other way except that it had iron bars crossing it. Now, however, apparently with the object of concealing the terrible crime being committed, an old sheet had been hung before the aperture. But "murder will

out." The light of the stable-lantern hung within was but dim, but sufficient to throw on the sheet a distinct shadow of what was going on. Nor was the signalman entirely dependent on the reflection. There were several rents in the temporary screen, and through the largest of these he could now and then plainly see the men—there were two of them and their victim. He saw them drag the body either already dead or insensible, from beneath a manger, and then one of them held it up while his companion climbed up to a beam, having in his hand a rope with a noose in it. This he lowered over the head of the murdered man, and then they both hauled at the rope until the body was suspended by the neck. It was necessary for them to use their united strength to effect this, for the body, as the signalman distinctly made out, was that of a heavy person with remarkable abdominal development. What immediately followed must have made the observer's hair stand on end to behold. It was evidently the intention of the murderers to dismember the body, and they commenced by disembowelling it. The signalman saw the knife, witnessed the stab, and what followed, but was compelled to stick to his post, and there was no one within call to whom he could give information, until presently a platelayer chanced to come along, and to him he imparted the startling intelligence. In a few minutes the police were communicated with, and they burst into the stable just in time to catch the pair of ruffians in the act of putting the last stitches in the outer covering of a full-sized "guy" that had been previously "stuffed" so full as to need some alteration to make it appear more symmetrical.

To return to my shadows. There were mysteries abroad to-night as when the signalman received his fright, if one chose to regard them as such. Here is a window blind on which is reflected what seemingly is some religious ceremony of a highly heathenish character. It appears to be a sort of idol worship, only that the object of adoration is not inanimate. Elevated cross-legged on a kind of throne, the weird figure, which wears neither coat nor waistcoat, and the sleeves of whose shirt are rolled up above its elbows, holds in its hand something that resembles a heavy book with a handle to it, now and again thumping it down on the board on which he is seated, after the manner of certain energetic pulpit preachers. Gathered about

him and sitting on the floor are several men and women, who repeatedly bow their heads and jerk their bodies forward, at the same time that they fling out their right hand, returning that member to their breast and flinging it out again quicker than seconds are ticked on a clock, as though they were assuring the presiding genius that they were laying to heart all that he was propounding, and unconditionally accepted the same. But it was nothing of the kind. All that the fantastic shadows on the blind indicated was that a family of hard-working slop-tailors were busy within, that the cross-legged deity was merely a garret-master in the tailoring way, the article he held in his hand being not a book but the "goose" with which he irons the seams. As to the eccentric movement of his worshippers, they were attributable to the hot haste with which they were stitching away, so as to be able to earn at the rate of a shilling a day of the "middle-man," who paid them the magnificent sum of sevenpence for making a pair of gentleman's trousers and elevenpence for a fashionable overcoat.

Another cobbler, a woman bobbing over a washing-tub, and with another reflection on the window-blind of the room above that is startlingly suggestive of a male chastising a female with a Windsor chair, and we approach Stepney Station, where I found myself looking out for one particular window. I had the better opportunity for so doing because, from some cause or other, the train at that part of the journey slackened in speed and proceeded slowly.

The window in question was one with which I was in some degree familiar, having frequently had my attention drawn towards it when in daylight I had travelled by rail in that insalubrious region. Whether boy or girl was conjectural, but the child that was to be seen at that open casement, whenever the weather was favourable, was probably a cripple. I arrived at this conclusion from the circumstance that the ragged little head and the spare shoulders were obviously not those of a child that was standing on its feet. The wan little face, seemingly, could be raised so as to look out only when its owner rested both hands on the window-sill, the body being in a recumbent position. Anyhow, he (I will assume that it was a boy) was always a-bed; the bedstead being an egg-box or the sort of long shallow trunk oranges are brought in

from abroad. I was satisfied on this point by a memorable circumstance.

It was in the month of July last, and I chanced to be on that railway and in a train that was conveying a hilarious ragged flock for a day's delight in the country. The engine slackened in speed, as on the present occasion, at the same spot, and the roystering young holiday-makers, all agog with gleeful anticipation, crowded at the carriage windows, waving their handkerchiefs and "hooraying" lustily. Suddenly made aware that we were in his neighbourhood, I thought of the little cripple, and wondered if he were at the window, and what he thought of it all. I looked out to see. Yes, he was there. It was not in human nature but that he must have longed to be going with them, and more than at any other time bemoaned his hard fate, poor little chap, that he must remain shut up in that back room, sick and a prisoner. But he put a brave face on it all. He rested on only one hand to raise his face up, and with the other hand he waved, as well as he could—which was not very well—what looked like a woman's nightcap. Probably he had caught it up in a hurry and did not himself quite know what it was. He cried "hooray" too. The distance was too great and the noise in our train too loud for the sound of his voice to reach us, but I saw his mouth open and his lips moving, and they were shaped to "hoo—ray" quite distinctly. He was excited to such an extent that he had kicked aside his ragged blanket, exposing the egg-box, or whatever it was that was square-ended and made of rough deal, and branded, in black letters, with the shipping mark "R. P.," with a star.

That was how I discovered the nature and quality of my little cripple's bedstead. And I may here mention, to the credit of the old grandmother or whoever it was—I am thinking of the hooray nightcap—who had the care of him, that they did seemingly all they could for his amusement. He had quite a garden on his window-sill. At each end was a garden pot in which were planted what might have been scarlet runners only that they were too feeble to "run" much and, as far as I could see, were never scarlet, and in the centre there was a healthy though limited crop of grass in a preserved meat tin. He kept pigeons, too. Just over the window, which

was the highest in the house, was a small pigeon-house, and, by means of a string that hung within his reach, he at pleasure opened and closed their street door. Once I saw the birds—there were two on the window-sill eating something out of his thrust-out hand, which was the only part of him that was visible, and from which I argued that he was not so well as usual that morning.

It was odd that the train should go slow at that spot on the night I am speaking of just as it did that ragged-school excursion day, which, when I came to think of it, was the last occasion of my getting a peep at my young friend. Where was he now? And how did he get on for amusement now that the bleak winter had come on and the windows had to be shut close always, and that dingy back room was the whole world to him? It was easy to discover his window, not only because of the pigeon-house above it, but from the circumstance of the window adjoining belonging to a room where dwelt a renovator of old hats, and who usually had half a dozen of those articles of head gear in process of furbishing and hung out on a pole.

The blind of the little cripple's window was drawn, and a dim light was in the room, and for the moment I was afraid that long days and short days were now all as one to him, for the reflection on the faded calico was exactly like the shadow of a coffin. It was slant-ended like the mournful receptacle mentioned, and its reflection was cast on the blind as though it stood on trestles in the middle of the room. The illusion was so perfect that I was considerably startled when, grasping the edge of his narrow bed, my little cripple raised his head and shoulders and turned over on his other side, and then I saw another pair of shoulders and another head —the latter, I am almost prepared to make affidavit, wearing the identical nightcap before mentioned, stoop low over the wooden box as though to kiss its restless tenant, after which, and just as our train moved on again, with kindly hands she "tucked him in."

CHRISTMAS ON CRUTCHES.

Cripples of the slums—The child cripple of the Rag and Famish family—A bit of a pantomime in Drury Lane—Crippled Joey—"He's always down: he likes it"—Hard lot of cripple girls—The Home in the Marylebone Road—A friendly visit at Christmas time—Preparing Christmas presents—Goblin aspect of the work-room—Dinner-time—A sad march past—Bad enough, but what might have been!

It is a fact well known to those who are familiar with the haunts, homes, and habits of what may be called the very lowest class, that there is scarcely a so-called "slum," court, alley, or back street in the whole of the metropolis but that reckons amongst its juvenile population at least one confirmed cripple. It has been often noticed and commented on that in the most squalid and unwholesome rookeries the rising generation there abiding, ill-clad, half-fed, unclean, and miserably lodged, will, as a rule, and as regards activity and seeming robustness, bear comparison with children born and reared under happier auspices. To a certain extent this is no doubt true. At the same time it should not be forgotten that it is not every born ragamuffin who continues to exist and thrive in contradiction of common sense and sanitary law. It is only the tougher sort who somehow manage to make a good fight of it against the formidable odds against evens at starting.

Probably for one child of a family who accomplishes the difficult feat there are two others, his brothers or sisters, weak little weeds, who give in long before they have legs even to stand on. But the weaker ones do not invariably go to the wall—to the cemetery wall, that is to say. They may appear to be fairly on the way thither, but occasionally they halt on the road and compound the matter by entering on a lease of life more or less extended as cripples. There are few sights more pitiable than that of a crippled child, nor, to my thinking, is the painfulness of this spectacle at all mitigated should the poor little creature be one of what has been termed the great "Rag and Famish family." It is sadder on that account. It must be bad enough for the child of respectable parents who have means to ease in all manner of ways the irksomeness of the little one's affliction; but it must be infinitely worse where the cripple is a

helpless waif of the court or alley, whose mother—if he has one—is always busy, as are his sisters, and have never an hour to spare from the match-box making or the slop-tailoring, at which they must toil early and late, or the family go hungry. It would not be easy to exaggerate the melancholy and weariness of such a child. In the winter time and when wet weather has set in there is nothing for it but to sit and mope, probably without playthings or playmates, in the dismal, unhealthy room in which the whole family work and eat and sleep. In the summer time, and when the sun is shining, and the pavements are warm and dry, he is better off, for then, if he has any command at all of his lower limbs, he can manage to shuffle along the passage and into the street, and seated out of the way under the wall, watch the uproarious romps of children of his own age, and in which, much as he may desire to do so, he can no more participate than he can fly up into the air. It is a mistake to suppose that a child, crippled from its birth even, grows reconciled to its helplessness, and has not the desire for active fun that other children have. No matter how difficult, if by any ingenious shift or contrivance it can be arranged, it will be achieved, or it will not be for want of trying.

I once witnessed a curious instance of this on a summer afternoon while exploring the back regions of Drury Lane. Some boys were playing on the path at some game of which "leap frog" was the basis, and, pausing to observe the sport, I discovered that the boy who was "down," or "making a back" for the others, had his poor legs so twisted that it was impossible for him to stand, and his only means of locomotion was to drag himself along in a sitting position with a wooden block in each of his hands, which he used to lift his body along. He was unable to make a proper "back," but he crouched down and bent his head to his chest, and in that way provided a tolerable substitute. I inquired of one of the hilarious youths who were engaged in the "overing" part of the business how the cripple managed when it came to his turn to leap over the others.

"It never do come to his turn," was the reply; "he's always 'down.' He likes the lark of it, and he don't mind how hard you pitch on him, or how much you 'bump' him, or 'spur' him, so long as you let him play. You like it, don't you, Joey?"

On which poor crippled Joey raised his red and perspiring face with a happy grin on it, and replied in effect that he rather thought he did, and that they were to cut away and "keep the pot a-bilin'."

The child cripple of the alley may in time be able to do as much in the way of sport and pastime, but his distorted limbs are as yet too tender for rough usage. His only chance for "joining in" in any game with the others is when, on rare occasions, they all squat down "story-telling." The little cripple is somebody at that time. In his solitary hours, poor chap, he has nothing better to amuse him than to "make up" stories; and though his collection for the most part is of the patchwork order, and contrived out of bits and scraps of tales he knows only the beginnings and the endings of, he somehow weaves them into romances of such absorbing interest that the most turbulent of the young alleyites listen with their mouths ajar while he relates them.

Childhood, however, is not the most trying time for the crippled boy or girl whose affliction is incurable, and whose parents and friends are of the ill-paid lower labouring class. As regards girls especially, it must come cruelly hard to one whose deformity renders her incapable, when she arrives at an age when other girls are able to help towards their own support and that of their younger brothers and sisters, to be condemned to eat the bread of idleness, and which is embittered by her knowledge of how much hard striving is necessary to earn the price of a single loaf. Blessed with health and the free use of her limbs, a young female can gain a living in many ways. There are thousands such employed at warehouses and factories, and as many more happy and comfortable in domestic service. But such means of self-support are denied the poor creature, who at best can drag herself but slowly along on crutches. True, there are home employments, but such of them as she can turn her hand to are of a poor and paltry kind, and scarcely worth following. Her prospects are indeed dismal. Her parents, her sisters, and brothers, maybe, are willing to help her all they can; but, though they do so uncomplainingly, she knows full well that she is a heavy drag on their small resources, and that she must remain so until such time as brothers and sisters separate and the old folks die, when her only asylum

will be the workhouse. If she had but a trade she could work at, in the pursuit of which being compelled to be constantly sitting down would be no obstacle—a respectable occupation at which, when she had thoroughly acquired it, she might, by steady, hard work, earn 10s. or 12s. a week! Next to a sound pair of legs to walk with, it would be the greatest blessing that could be bestowed on her. But, alas! who will take such trouble with her? There are institutions open to receive destitute young girls who are strong and active; but who cares to undertake the heavy responsibility of providing for a helpless cripple?

She may not be aware of it—indeed, it is possible that a great many persons in a position to be better informed have as little knowledge of the fact—but there already exists an institution exactly suited to her necessities. It is situated in the Marylebone Road, and is called the Home for Cripples. Unfortunately, however, it is not an asylum to which all who are incapacitated by lameness or deformity have free access. As may be readily supposed, an establishment of such a sort must cost a large sum of money to maintain, and it is found impossible properly to carry out its humane objects unless a certain sum is guaranteed with each applicant for admission. It is not very much—only £10 a year—rather less than 4s. a week. For this sum, which must be assured for three years, the authorities of the Home will take in a girl whose crippled condition renders her otherwise incapable, but who has the use of her eyesight and her hands. It is not a hospital or a refuge for the bedridden and the utterly helpless. Its aim is to enable poor girls who are physically unable to follow ordinary pursuits to earn a livelihood by their own exertions. Any child is eligible for admission, but she must have attained her twelfth year at least, so that at the expiration of three years she may at once make a start in the business that has been taught her. Meanwhile she has the best of medical attendance, abundant food, and comfortable lodging, and is thoroughly instructed in millinery, dressmaking, or some other remunerative feminine employment, according to the nature of her infirmity. It commonly happens that, as a natural consequence of their being much confined in miserable homes from the time of their birth, the poor cripples' constitution has been more or less under-

mined, and has, if possible, to be set up and strengthened. To accomplish this desirable end, in connection with the Home in the Marylebone Road there is a seaside retreat at Bognor, where, in convenient batches, and all through the summer months, the inmates enjoy a long spell of holiday, and they have their festivities at Christmas time

Indeed, it was my curiosity as regards this last that led me to make a visit to the Home in question. I read that the managers were appealing to the public for funds to enable them to carry on their good work (each inmate must cost at least four times as much as the sum stipulated for), and I at once began wondering whether Father Christmas, as all of us who are blessed with health and strength know him, is so kind as to look in and give a cheery greeting to these poor cripples, who at such a season might well be sad at heart, and in sore need of a fillip to their flagging spirits. I was glad to find that there was a fair prospect of such being the case. The decorations were not yet commenced, but in a day or two work was to be put aside, and all engaged in making paper flowers and wreaths, and to adorn the walls of the great room, and that, according to custom, there was to be a gay gathering, invitations having been already sent out to a great many "old girls," *i. e.*, former inmates who had passed a happy two years at the Home, and were now, thanks to its invaluable help, eating the bread of independence. I felt when I was told this that I should like to be present, and witness the arrival of the guests, and sit down among them—the crooked, the halt, and the hunch-backed, but withal so bright and happy—and learn from them a lesson of humility and thankfulness. But this could not be, as I had not the time to spare. I had to make the best of my then opportunity. It was nearly dinner time, I was informed, but the inmates were as yet all busy in the work-room, and thither I proceeded.

It would not be easy to imagine a quainter, and at the same time a more touching, spectacle than that which was suddenly revealed to me when, the door of the work-room being opened, I got a glimpse of what was going on within. It was like opening an illustrated book by Hans Christian Andersen, or the Brothers Grimm, at the most fantastic part. There is a picture, if I remember rightly, in a nursery volume produced

by the gentlemen last mentioned, in which are seen several good-natured elves squatted on the floor in a cobbler's stall, busy as bees in the manufacture of boots and shoes, as a pleasant surprise for the highly honoured cordwainer when he wakes in the morning. I would not for one instant wish to say anything that was uncomplimentary as regards the little women I found so industriously engaged at the cripples' home, but I must confess that for the moment I was forcibly reminded of the goblin book. The faces, the figures, the cheerful striving under manifest difficulties, the striking contrast between the work and the workers, all tended to give the scene an elfish aspect.

I do not know exactly how many girls and young women were present—fifty or sixty, probably—and not one of them but was lamed, or maimed, or so physically deformed as to be unfit to stand or sit or walk as do folks who are in full possession of the use of their limbs. There were a great many hunchbacks, poor creatures whose heads seemed fixed between their shoulders without the intervention of a neck, but, without exception, with bright and hopeful faces, and without a trace of that sour despondency that so commonly characterises this particular physical affliction in young folk. But except that they were dwarfish in stature, and, in many instances, their faces, though cheerful, bore that indescribable expression that long acquaintance with lingering days and sleepless nights induces, there was not—excepting the crutches deposited close to their sides—very much to denote them cripples.

They sat on low stools round about large tables, on which was heaped material for the work in hand, or articles completed, each group being managed by a "monitor;" while at one end of the room, perched up on a chair of authority, sat the "mistress monitor" of them all, as bright-eyed, cheerful a creature as one would wish to speak to, but herself so absolutely a cripple, that she could not move without assistance. She had been at the Home, as she herself informed me, five and twenty years—since she was twelve years old, indeed—and was in the enjoyment of moderately good health, and quite happy and contented. She was working away as busily as any of them, cutting green American cloth into strips to bind straw-work bags with. I was informed that usually the

inmates are employed in making articles of utility and for wear, but that at Christmas time it was customary for them to provide fancy articles, and stock a small bazaar attached to the premises, and from which friends and patrons are invited to make purchases to assist the funds of the Home.

It was the last-mentioned accounted in great measure for the fantastic appearance the great work room presented. Low seated on her stool, every cripple had in hand some article suggestive of the festive season or of holidays and present making. The material used was for the most part straw plait, and worsteds and scraps of cloth and stuff of the gayest colours. They made all kinds and shapes of baskets for holding flowers, and tatting, and knitting, and needlework, and dainty bags and worked slippers, and toys and kincks for the toilet table and the Christmas-tree, and table-mats, the latter and the work baskets being many of them elegantly embroidered with buds and blossoms that shone up brightly against the mellow straw. And there sat the three score grotesque-like figures, scupping and stitching and nimbly cutting and contriving as noiselessly almost as though they toiled with fairy fingers, and what they wrought on was unreal, the rules of the establishment enjoining strict silence in the work-room.

With Messrs. Grimm's good-natured goblins still running in my mind, it seemed but proper that I should converse with the lady superintendent in whispers, lest at sound of the human voice the elfish troop should of a sudden vanish, leaving only their stools and their tools behind them. But presently this last fancy was sternly dissipated. As already mentioned, as they sat at work there was not so very much to denote their crippled condition. But presently a signal was given that it was dinner time, and then their various afflictions became manifest. There were many who could not rise without assistance, and these were helped on to their unreliable feet by the young women helpers at the Home, who adjusted the crutches under the arms of their particular charges, while others managed to limp along with the aid of a friendly arm to lean on. I stood by the door as they slowly filed through, and the thought foremost in my mind was what would have been their miserable plight had they been com-

pelled to remain in the poverty-stricken homes they had been rescued from. But they have good times at the Home. I followed the last poor little maid as, led by her attendant, she limped down stairs to the dining-room below, from whence savoury odours ascended; and after grace was sung I saw them, a hundred in all, seated at a good hot dinner, to which, despite their physical disabilities, they seemed capable of doing ample justice.

Did I say that I followed the last one out of the work-room? That was a mistake. There were a few who could by no means manage the stairs, and there they sat patiently on their stools till the helpful young women came and carried them bodily to a little dining-room on the same floor, where a table was spread for them. And this, I suppose, is the arrangement on the day of days, when holly-boughs and flower-wreaths decorate the walls, and the atmosphere of the house is odorous of the fragrance of roast beef and Christmas pudding. A saddening sight maybe, and one a contemplation of which would probably be blurred with the tear of pity. But how much sadder it might be! Think of this hundred poor crippled creatures, well housed and happy, and again on what their fate would have been had they not been rescued from the penury and seemingly hopelessly dreary future their sorrowful eyes once looked forward to.

A CONVERTED BURGLAR.

The modern burglar, as regards his appearance, not so black as he is painted —My burglar, and his account of himself—The tricks of his youth, his progress in crime, and what occasioned his "conversion"—His anxiety to be "taken up" by some religious body—He reveals certain secrets of his late profession—The revolver question—Working in "co."—Single-handed, and whacking the swag—Flogging, the burglar's horror—My burglar's sentiments and opinions on the subject—Claws for breakfast—"I'd rather do an extra year penal than take twenty-five as they now lay 'em on."

In these piping times of burglary, it may perhaps be some comfort for the nervous householder resident in the suburbs to be informed that at all events, as far as personal appearance is concerned, the burglar is not so black as it is the common habit to paint him.

In the not impossible event of paterfamilias being suddenly started to wakefulness to find "a man in the room," it by no means follows that the nocturnal intruder will prove a burly ruffian of the Bill Sykes pattern, beetle-browed, and ferocious-looking almost as an enraged gorilla. Illustrated newspapers delight in so portraying him; but such an individual does not fairly represent the fraternity—always assuming that by "burglar" is meant a person possessed of a thorough knowledge of the business, neat-handed, cool-headed—in short, such a one as would be spoken of by his friends and intimates as "a good workman." The ponderous ruffian does not, as a rule, take kindly to those branches of the criminal profession the pursuit of which is attended with a considerable amount of personal risk. As one of a gang, he is never backward in proving his prowess by assisting in an attack on a solitary pedestrian in some lonesome thoroughfare. Indeed, provided he is enabled to come up with his prey from behind, and it is a very dark night, his worst enemy cannot say of him but that, single-handed, he has pluck enough to deal a downright murderous blow preparatory to overhauling the pockets of his insensible victim as he lies prone on the pavement.

But the professional burglar, generally speaking, is a man of a different stamp. There is usually nothing in his appearance

to indicate him a dangerous character, and he would easily pass for an honest mechanic earning a livelihood in a creditable manner. On more than one occasion I have seen notorious burglars who, arrested a few hours before in the midst of their depredations, were being brought before the magistrate for a first hearing; and in every instance they appeared far more clean and respectable looking than the mildest "drunk and disorderly" his worship had to deal with. Such was Mr. Peace, of musical memory. Such was the individual with whom I made acquaintance a few days since, and who, although—if his word might be taken for it—at the present time a reformed character, fully and firmly resolved to avoid in future the ways of crime, has in his time, and burglariously speaking, been as great a rascal as ever stood in the dock at the Old Bailey.

I have no hesitation in speaking of him thus unreservedly, because in so doing I am treating him more leniently than, when making known to me who and what he was, he treated himself. His most inveterate enemy could not have estimated him more disparagingly. It was hard to believe that his self-condemnation was not somewhat exaggerated, his "get up" being so highly respectable. He was attired completely in black, except for a narrow white throat-band and a small patch of snowy shirt-front that enlivened the bosom part of his buttoned-up surtout. He was a man of medium height and of middle age, and excepting that his face had that indescribable "case-hardened" look peculiar to those whom the mention of such places as Portland, Chatham, and Dartmoor serves as something more than geographical reminders, he might, judged by his appearance, have been a missionary of the locality. I intimated as much to him, and he straightway proceeded to inform me, with an affectation of sanctimoniousness that was transparent as glass, that he should feel deeply grateful to be permitted to make himself useful even in that subordinate capacity, if nothing better offered; but that he was ambitious to be engaged in more useful work.

"I am desirous, sir," said he, coming to the point without preface, "to be taken up by some religious body, and put forward in my true character of a converted burglar. I don't pretend to say that the idea is original, or that there is any

merit in it. I am aware that there are converted clowns, colliers, cadgers, and pickpockets in any number at the present time preaching from the public platform and relating their experiences, so that those who listen may take warning by the same; but what I do say, sir—and could easily prove if they would give me an opportunity—is that there is not one of 'em that could tell such a thrilling story as I could. They make a wonderment of their conversions, and the crowds that listen turn up their eyes in amazement that a man so steeped in guiltiness could manage to raise himself and take to the paths of truth and virtue, but I should like to get a chance of telling 'em the sort of character I have been. I could startle 'em, I reckon. I don't say it boastingly—there is nothing farther from my thoughts than *that*, sir; but I will make bold to say it must have been nothing short of a miracle that turned my heart, and snatched as a brand from the burning such an out-and-out scoundrel as I have been.

"It a'most makes my hair stand upright," he continued, "when I look back on the awful hardened villain I used to be. It fills me with remorse, sir, and overwhelms me with shame when it all comes rushing back to my memory; and, in a manner of speaking, it is like bruising of old wounds whenever I speak about it. But I glory in it all, and sometimes I wish I had been a great deal worse than I was, so that my conversion might appear more astonishing." And now, as already related, he proceeded to favour me with a brief sketch of his crimeful career, in a tone and with a glibness that left no doubt in my mind but that it was his projected platform performance, conned over and embellished till he had it all by heart and complete. I felt equally sure that though he might be well able to make good his assertion as to having been an out-and-out scoundrel, he was likewise a most unscrupulous liar, and that much of the infamy he confessed to had no other foundation than his imagination.

He commenced by telling me that at the early age of nine years, being left an orphan, he was adopted by his grandparents, and that shortly afterwards, his grandfather dying, he stole the two half-crowns with which the old gentleman's eyes were kept closed and went to the play with the money. And that, faithful to this promising beginning, he from that time

gave his whole attention to dishonest practices; and before he had completed his twelfth year he had been sent to prison eleven separate times and birched three times, all the convictions being of course for short periods, but that when he was just turned fourteen he earned for himself the distinction of a twelvemonth's conviction for causing the death of a valuable horse by inserting pounded glass into its fodder, the animal being the property of a person who had taken him in out of charity and found him employment as a stable lad. He had evidently studied this episode of his iniquitous career with a view to stage effect, and was able in touching terms to describe the looks of reproach with which the poor dumb creature regarded him while it was struggling in its dying agonies. He had the story pat, and readily reeled off the brief particulars of his various convictions until he grew to manhood, and, becoming a villain of deeper dye, tried his hand at burglary. For the last-mentioned crime he had been three times convicted, for periods varying from three to seven years. Within the past twelve months he had been committed for trial for the same offence, but had experienced a lucky escape. Owing to some blunder in the indictment the graver charge was abandoned, and he was sentenced to only six months' imprisonment.

He wished me to believe that it was his gratitude to Providence for countenancing this fortunate let-off that had led him to reflect whether it was not possible for him to turn over a new leaf and "do something to better himself." He was endeavouring to do so now, he seriously informed me. He did not seek extravagant remuneration, but the labourer was worthy his hire, and he would be satisfied with a modest salary and his board and lodging guaranteed. As yet, however, although he had tried in every quarter that seemed at all likely, he could find no one who would take him by the hand. He appeared to be quite downhearted and dejected at the discovery, and confidentially informed me that he made sure that either one of half a dozen religious bodies he could mention would have "jumped at him."

I was by no means sorry to hear that they had not done so, nor surprised either for that matter, for a more barefaced impostor or one through whose sham it was easier to penetrate I

had never met with. I had, however, been informed beforehand that it was quite true that he had for many years been in the burglary way of business; and it occurred to me that if I could induce him to converse on the subject he might reveal certain things that at the present time might be turned to useful account.

He was shy at first of talking freely on the subject, but professional pride presently prevailed, and he spoke without reserve—always of course giving me to understand that his whole and sole reason for doing so was that he might convince me how sincere his conversion was. Having in mind recent events bearing on the subject, I asked him to what he attributed the modern practice among burglars of arming themselves with firearms whenever they set out intent on business. To which he made answer that it was quite a mistake; that it was because new men who now adopted the profession were more ferociously disposed than the men of the old school, or that the former had less respect than the latter for human life. As far as he was able to speak, it was the "new hands" who went in for revolvers, and not the old ones, who worked in "co.," and on the sound, old-fashioned principle of "sharing the danger and whacking the swag." My converted burglar informed me that the new hands differed from the old in the important particular that they worked "single;" that is to say, they planned their work and executed it without any assistance; not because they declined to associate with the old ones—as the candidate for platform employment hastened to add, with undisguised contempt for the whole race of paltry pretenders—but because they were unacquainted with any of the "school," being themselves green hands and novices, who were ambitious "to be top-sawyers when as yet they were fit for nothing but to pick up chips."

It would be found, he said, on reference to the trials of those who had been captured for burglary during the past ten or twelve years, that it was the "single-handed" men who were most addicted to carrying firearms. So provided, they had more courage and felt more "masterful" than they would if armed with a life-preserver, or even a blade of any kind, as the latter could be used only at close quarters. It should be

said that a "single hand" had more need to take care of himself than if he was one of a "co." When there were three in a job there would always be one outside to look out, not only for any person coming along, but for lights in the windows, showing that somebody had been disturbed, in which case it was easy for him to whistle a warning to his pals to clear out. But the single-handed man lacked these various advantages. It was neck or nothing with him when he was once boxed in (when he entered a house), and a revolver was his best safeguard. Not that his prime purpose in carrying it was to maim or murder people—only to frighten 'em and to make them keep their distance and get out of the way in case of a rumpus and they stood between him and a means of escape. The sight of a pistol would generally do it, but if it wasn't enough, a couple of bangs aimed at the wall or ceiling was pretty sure to bring 'em to their senses, and the man got away. That was all he wanted.

Did he think, I asked him, that if it became the practice for householders to take loaded firearms to their bedrooms burglary would be of rarer occurrence? Not a bit. It warn't one householder in half a dozen who would have pluck enough to shoot a man, and it would be much worse for the householder than at present, because if a burglar had a pistol pointed at him he would be tempted to take quick aim with his own handy weapon and make sure of first pop. Were burglars sometimes needlessly alarmed? Rather, and an unclerical grin stole over the rascal's face as he recalled the incident. It had happened so to himself. It was at a crib at Kilburn, and he had pulled the affair off all right. Had got the "fine stuff" all ready on the table for tying up in his handkerchief, when, as he thought, he heard the handle of the room door turn, and bolted out of the window and down the ladder, and made off. And the next day he read in the evening newspaper of an attempted burglary, it being supposed that the burglar was alarmed by a cat whose young kittens had been accidentally shut in the room.

I put it to him as an old practitioner, and as a man who before his conversion must have had frequent opportunities for discussing such matters with his companions, what was the punishment most dreaded by them, and he unhesitatingly replied, "Flogging."

"You would recommend it as a means for putting a stop to the many desperate burglaries that have taken place lately?"

"I didn't say I'd recommend it," he replied, with an earnest shake of his head and a twitching of the muscles about his mouth as though the subject involved certain experiences he could not recall without wincing. "If anything would put a stop to it it is flogging, but no man with feelings for his fellow-creatures, no matter how bad they might be, could recommend flogging. Leastways, not if he knew anything about it himself." I hardly liked to put to him the delicate question, had he ever had his back scored with the knotted thongs?—nor was it needful that I should do so. He screwed his mouth again, and shrugged his shoulders shiveringly, and presently continued, "No one, except he has been through with it, can have any idea what the sufferings are. I have been through with it, and I've got the scars to prove; and I tell you this, sir, if I was so unfortunate as to slide back again to my wicked old ways, and the judge was to put it to me, 'Will you have three years' penal and twenty-five lashes, or five years without 'em?' I'd take the five years and think it a light let-off."

It was evident to me from his manner of speaking that he quite meant what he said, and that the opinion he had expressed was not hastily arrived at. It was not the less incredible, however.

"How long a time does it take to give a man twenty-five lashes?" I asked him.

"Well, they don't hurry over it," he replied, with another wince at the rueful reminiscence. "They lay it on pretty well as regular as clockwork; and you can tell to a tick when the next stinger is coming. I should think twenty-five might take as many 'arf minits."

"And rather than bear twelve minutes and a half of sharp pain, you would serve two years' imprisonment?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," he replied, and with an offended impatience, that contrasted strongly with his hitherto meek and mild demeanour; "you speak as if a fellow as soon as he's got his sentence was taken out of the dock straight and got his dose of the cat, and there was an end of it."

"It can't much matter as to that," said I. "He has

twenty-five lashes to receive, and they will cause him no more pain to-morrow or next week than if he was punished immediately."

"Hah! that's where you're wrong," returned the converted burglar, with an energetic shake of his head; "that's where everybody is wrong who argues a thing without knowing. It is bad enough when it comes; there's no mistake about that. But waiting for it is the worst part. No day or hour is mentioned for it at the time at which a man receives his sentence when he is to have 'claws for breakfast,' as it is called. It may be to-morrow, or it may be a fortnight or three weeks hence. It didn't so much matter when old Calcraft had the handling of the cat—he hadn't got strength enough to lay it on so as to hurt very much; but it's another matter when one of those blessed six-foot Millbank warders sets about you. They cut bits out, that's what they do, as well I know, and could prove to this very day if it was necessary. It must be a horrible sort of punishment, or they wouldn't think it necessary to physic a man and get his body in order before they give it him. You know what, certain as death, is coming one day or other, and you go to bed every night and lay in a sweat for fear when the warder comes round at six next morning he'll say, 'You needn't put your shirt on this morning.' And if over night the doctor should order you a couple of pills or a draught, you can't get a wink of sleep for funking about it, and very likely nothing comes of it that time, and you're kept three or four weeks at the same kind of torture. And at last you get it!"

He closed the subject abruptly with these last words, but the shiver and the sudden close setting of his teeth that accompanied the utterance of them told plainer than speech of the tenacity with which "claws for breakfast" sticks in a man's memory, and suggested the expediency of treating our modern bloodthirsty burglars with the same indigestible matutinal meal.

CURIOSITIES OF LEATHER LANE.

The Lane, and those who do their marketing there on Sunday morning—A virtuous vestry—"Cag-mag Row"—A quarter of a mile of huckster's barrows—Old boots and shoes—The giant in ankle-jacks, and the child stall-keeper—The old "translator," and his daughter Kitty—I visit the former at his abode—The drunken wife whose pillow was an old fish basket—The cobbler's curse—"If there's a pound earned, I'll wager she melts half of it in gin!"

In the wicked old times the Leather Lane market was permitted to keep at full swing on the Sabbath day just as long as the swarming costermongers and barrow-men, as well as the shopkeepers, found it worth while to continue to do business. A virtuous vestry, however, put an end to that outrageous state of things. For the past year or two the police have been acting under strict orders to clear the lane by eleven o'clock on Sunday morning; but seemingly, finding this impossible (though there are so many policemen about, one would think that a riot was imminent), the authorities are content so that the thoroughfare is quite clear by twelve o'clock. Naturally, it is within this hour of grace, as it may be called, that there is more noise and clamour, and more urgent business done, than in any one hour preceding.

One is almost afraid to attempt to describe the scene, it is so difficult to do so without laying himself open to a suspicion of exaggeration. For a space that may be roughly taken at a quarter of a mile the whole thoroughfare, roadway and pavements, is one dense block of hucksters and people, the latter elbowing and wriggling their way at a snail's pace amongst the gutter stalls and the wheels of the barrows, on which is exposed for sale a variety of goods representing the possible requirements of every class of customers likely to favour the "Lane" with their Sunday morning patronage. There are among the rest barrows by the dozen from which is retailed what is declared to be butcher's meat. I have no knowledge that warrants me in contradicting the assertion. If I were appointed sanitary inspector of that district I should probably get into great trouble, and betray my utter incompetence for the office, by seizing almost every barrow-load and condemning it to

destruction; which only shows what little reliance may be placed on the evidence of one's senses of sight and smell. Besides, as I heard one gutter butcher indignantly remark to a hesitating customer who had something to say about his meat being red where it should be white, and white where it should be red: "D'ye expect prime Southdown shoulders of mutton for threepence ha'penny a pound?" And the last-mentioned was *his* price for the joint mentioned, and fourpence for legs, and the same for loins.

But for that matter the same marvellously low prices ruled at all the stalls. A blind man led through Leather Lane on a Sunday morning might well suppose that the "good time" long promised had indeed come at last. Bacon at fourpence, cheese at threepence the pound, cabbage plants a penny the "lapful," potatoes five pounds for twopence, apples and pears at a penny a pound. And besides this liberal display of eatables there were stalls where secondhand tools might be bought, and stalls kept by swarthy tinkers, whose stock was secondhand pots and kettles, the tinker's next neighbour being a milliner, with fashionably trimmed hats for ladies from fifteenpence each, the stand next hers being that of a man with a large stock of secondhand doormats and scrubbing-brushes. Stalls in endless succession—old clothes and new clothes, clocks, carpets, old floorcloth, singing birds, artificial flowers, tags and flinders of women's finery, fried fish, damaged toys, damaged grapes, pills, old boots and shoes—every vendor exercising his lungs to their fullest capacity, and making a speaking trumpet of his hands, so as to make himself better heard in the deafening hubbub.

Old boots and shoes in amazing quantities, not only on the stalls, but in nooks and doorways, and built up at the base of the lamp-post at the street corner, market space being so precious. At the post the individual in charge of the sorry array of patched-up boots, and superintending the sale thereof, was a female so diminutive in size that her tousled old hat—which was suggestive of a last year's nest in which a bird of gay plumage had moulted—was no higher than that part of the lamp-post where the slender part joins the base. She could not have been older than ten or eleven years, but her worldly knowledge, in the old boot-and-shoe line of business, at all

events, was equal to that of a middle-aged matron. At the moment when my attention was attracted towards her she was endeavouring to do a stroke of trade with a navvy six feet high, who had brought out his little boy to buy him a pair of second-hand shoes.

The giant in ankle-jacks was no more a match for the shrewd little street market woman than his infant progeny would have been. The shoes were tried on, and at once pronounced by the navvy to be about "five sizes too large." She was instantly ready for him with a brief anecdote of a child of her acquaintance who was crippled for life in consequence of wearing shoes in which there was not free play for its toes, and, whipping out one of the curl papers from her hair, she tore it in two, and, stuffing a portion into each little boot, tried them on again, and declared that "now they fit lovely." She laughed to scorn the navvy's offer of ninepence for them, and, with a perfectly serious countenance, assured him that if it were not Sunday, and the pawnshops were open, she could get fifteenpence on those shoes for the asking, at the same time explaining that the whole and sole reason why she had offered them to him for the ridiculously low price of tenpence was, in the first place, because she had not taken a "blessed farden" all the morning, and in the next because in a minute or two she would be turned away by the police, and this was her last chance of selling. On this the good-natured excavator relented, and paid down the tenpence.

The transaction was scarcely completed when there emerged from an adjacent narrow alley a wretched-looking old man, with rags of slippers on his feet, and a tattered leather apron that charitably concealed the deficiencies of his nether raiment, bare-armed, and with hands so gnarled and knotted, and blunt and black at the finger nails, that they scarcely looked human. Despite these various drawbacks to a prepossessing appearance, however, and the additional one of his wearing a pair of wide-rimmed horn spectacles, that exaggerated the bleariedness of his eyes, it was plain at a glance that he was either the father or the grandfather of the shrewd little shoe-seller, and I was not surprised when I heard him address her.

"I thought I'd just come and give you a hand to carry 'em in, Kitty," said he. "It's very nigh twelve o'clock, my dear,

and we don't want 'em all kicked into the mud by the Bobbies, like they was last Sunday; do we, Kitty?"

"All right, father," said she; "you take 'em in, and I'll trot up the lane and get a bit o' something for dinner."

"Do, gal; and, Kitty, bring a bit hextry, because I thinks it wery likely your grandfather may drop in and pick a bit with us to-day," returned the old cobbler, whose voice and manner in speaking to the child were an amazing contrast to his rough and uncouth aspect.

"That'll be all accordin' to what mother'll be up to, won" it?" the girl remarked, as though she had some doubt of the wisdom of his last proposition.

"No fear of her," replied the cobbler; "she'll wake up as dry as a clinker as soon as the houses are open, and we sha'n't see any more of her till three o'clock."

Anyone, I suppose, is at liberty to call on a cobbler to consult him on the subject of shoe making or mending; and, having observed the house into which the old fellow carried his leather apron full of the unsold stock gathered up from the lamp-post, there were no difficulties in my way. When I say that I saw him enter the house with his burden it is scarcely correct, for he seemed to shoot it into a cellar in front of his abode, and then he vanished in at the street door. I experienced no difficulty in finding him, however, when a few minutes later I walked up the narrow alley and looked down into the cellar or kitchen; there, by the light of a tallow candle—though it was noon, and broad daylight in more favoured places—I saw him seated in the midst of a circle of all manner of boots and shoes, most of them seemingly in the last stage of dilapidation, and all of them mouldy and mildewed, tugging away at his wax-ends as though his life depended on his turning out the job in hand within a limited time. He looked up as my shadow darkened the open window, and, having hinted my business to him, he made answer that he would come up and speak with me about it. But I preferred to go down to him, and, he making no objection, I made my way through the house passage and down the kitchen stairs, and there joined him.

Soon, however, as I put my head in at the door I made a hasty step back, for there, dimly revealed by the feeble light of the tallow candle, stretched out straight on a bed of decaying

old soles and upper leather in a corner, with a crushed fish-basket for a pillow, was what looked like a dead woman. The old fellow saw in an instant why I hesitated, and observed in an off-hand manner,

"Oh, don't mind her. She's only sleeping it off. She got a sly glass or two among the neighbours, cuss 'em, this morning; not but that Sunday and weekdays is pretty much the same to her, wus luck for me."

It was, of course, not for me to mind, since he did not, and after I had justified my calling on him we talked of matters generally, and of his occupation in particular. He informed me that, with Kitty's assistance, he did pretty well as a "translator" (*i.e.*, a conjuror of wearable boots out of those that are utterly worn out and seemingly worthless). Yes, this was the material he worked on (the mildewed mounds by which his seat was surrounded). "All-sorts" it was called in the trade —men's, women's, children's, odds and ends—anything—and he could always buy as much as he wanted of it at the rate of two shillings a bushel. They were not always "pairs" that he made up, but he matched them as close as he could, and the Leather-laners were not over-nice about such matters. His daughter Kitty was his right hand. She generally managed to sell as fast as he could translate, and by pinching himself of sleep, getting to bed at twelve, being up and at it again at six, Sunday and weekdays, he could earn as much as five-and-twenty shillings a week.

"I should have supposed," I remarked, "that, earning as much as that, you could afford to live in a more comfortable place."

"Oh, it's comfortable enough if it comes to that," glancing contentedly round the wretched kitchen; "you see it's so roomy. Where else should I get a single room big enough to live in, and sleep in, and work in as well, especially considering the quantity of rubbish I'm obliged to have always nigh me? Looks rather damp! Well, it might be drier. But the rats is the worst of it; I can't keep anything from 'em. They gnaw the old boots and shoes and lick up the blacking, and when I go to bed there's a fight among 'em for the candle-end. At the same time, I don't think I could better myself in this neighbourhood, and four shillings a week isn't over much for

it. We could do very well, sir, if it wasn't for her." And he lowered his voice as he pointed to the slatternly wretch who, with her hair in disorder, lay with her face on the fish-basket.

"*That's* her cuss and mine too," and he signified a drinking measure with his waxy fist, and tossed off a dram at one gulp. "If there's a pound earned I'll wager she melts half of it in gin. She will have it, sir, or ——," and he finished the sentence by making a horrible grimace, and clawing the air with outspread two hands. "That's her, sir. And then poor Kitty she drops in for it, and then I have a say, and then *I* drop in for it, and old boots and shoes ain't the lightest of weapons to have shied at you. It's no use me trying to stand up against her. She's as strong as a horse, and as free with her fists as with her tongue when she's in her tantrums. Does she do any work? Now and then she goes out and does a bit of washing or cheering, but it all goes in gin. How long has she been at it? Blest if I can tell you. A good many years, though. Ever since I've lived here, and that's seven years."

"But is there no way of securing your hard earnings from such ruinous waste?" The poor little cobbler shook his head.

"Her way of doing it, you see, sir, is to wait on the gal. The public-house she uses is just close at hand to Kitty's post, and she keeps watch at the winder, and as soon as there is a pair sold she's down on the ha'pence before the poor child can pocket 'em. Why, many a time I've ——"

But at this point a sudden rustling of the fish-basket pillow on which the wretched woman's head reposed announced that she was waking up, and her husband began pegging away at a boot, at the same time, with a significant wink, bidding me good morning. And at the same moment the bony-fisted virago scrambled to her feet, and, staggering towards the cobbler, threateningly demanded fourpence of him. I thought it as well to give him a hint in good time.

THE WOOD-CHOPPER'S WEDDING.

I renew my acquaintance with the cobbler—His son Joe's impending marriage—Must be kept a secret from drunken mother—The cobbler's doubts and fears on account of the virago—I am invited to the wedding—A review of the wedding raiment of Kitty the bridesmaid, and that of her father—The young wood-chopper's bride—The marriage feast in Windmill Street, New Cut—The skin-dresser's toast—The old cobbler is inspired to sing the "Cork Leg"—Triumphant consummation.

It was not likely to occur to me that Sunday morning when I interviewed the kind-hearted old "translator" of old boots into new ones, in his kitchen in Leather Lane, that an invitation to a wedding would be brought about through his agency. It was his little daughter Kitty who kept the second-hand boot-and-shoe stall by the lamp-post in the Sunday-morning street market, where she first attracted my attention by her shrewd manner of managing a business transaction with a navvy, who bought a pair of child's boots of her.

It happened that I paid him a visit or two after that first one, and on the last occasion I found with him a young fellow, the two being engaged in anxious conversation. Though roughly dressed, he was bright and respectable looking, and the old fellow was evidently proud to introduce him to me as his son.

"And I tell you what, my boy," said he, in the tone of one relieved of a difficulty, "you may speak out before this gentleman, free and unafraid, as to a friend and adviser, which he's equal to being both. And if you ask my opinion, Joe, I say it's a slice of good luck that he chanced to drop in at this identical time, for you've so knocked me over with what you've come to speak about, that I hardly know what to say about it." After some not unnatural hesitation on the part of the young fellow to admit a stranger to a participation in a family secret of so delicate a nature, I got to understand that he was about to get married, and had come over from Windmill Street, in the New Cut, Lambeth, for the express purpose of breaking the news to his father and sister, and to beg of them to be

present at the ceremony. The difficulty was the mother—the pugnacious virago, whose habit it was to waste a large share of her husband's hard earnings in gin, and to punch and otherwise maltreat the poor little man when he refused to supply her with money for the purpose. The young fellow was anxious that his father should be present at the marriage feast, and his sister as well, but he could not possibly invite the mother.

"And that's the difficulty, you see, sir," said the cobbler, turning to me. "He wants me to be there, and, as a matter of course, I should like to. And he wants Kitty to go, and as it's to be in the character of a bridesmaid, she would cry her eyes out if she's disappointed; and if his mother was anything like what she ought to be, he'd be only to glad to ask her too. If she *could* be persuaded to keep off the gin just for this once!"—and he looked wistfully at his son, who however shook his head uncompromisingly.

"I wouldn't try it, father," said he, "for the best fi'-pun'-note that ever was made. You know what she is as well as I do. She might promise, p'r'aps, but she'd be flaring up and going at everybody, hammer and tongs, before the time. So it must not be thought of. Mother needn't know anything about it till afterwards. She's sure to be out drinking. I'll bring the cart over, and wait round the corner, and you and Kitty can do up a bundle of the things you are going to wear, and you can come just as you are, and bring it with you, and dress yourselves at my place, all quiet and comfortable, before we go to church."

So it was eventually arranged, the old gentleman himself respectfully suggesting that if I would condescend to "make one" at the party, if it was only to wish the newly-married couple good luck, it would be regarded as a favour never to be forgotten. The son echoing his father's hospitable sentiments, I readily accepted the invitation, the more willingly because it occurred to me as being just possible that the desperate little "translator" had it in his mind that it might be as well to be prepared with as strong a protecting force as possible, in case his precious wife should get wind of the conspiracy, and make an untimely appearance in Windmill Street in a hurricane of blazing wrath.

It was agreed that I should meet the party at the church door the following Monday morning, and I felt somewhat curious respecting the successful realisation of the daring scheme, the execution of which was to secure the attendance of the bridegroom's father and sister. My uneasiness on their account, however, was duly dissipated, for lo! at the appointed time, the bridal party hove in sight. It was contained in a four-wheeled cab, which might have passed as a vehicle engaged in ordinary service had it not been that on either side of the driver sat the respective male parents of the happy pair, each with a large rosette of white ribbon attached to his coat collar.

The attire of my friend the cobbler attested to the safe passage of the "bundle" recommended by his son. Had I met the old gentleman under any other circumstances, I certainly should not have recognised him again, he was so elaborately arrayed. He wore a white waistcoat, light trousers, and a stylish shooting-coat of a lively check pattern, a blue neckerchief, and a shirt-collar to which the term "stand-up" but tamely applied, it was so ambitiously a-tiptoe to reach the tops of his ears. But withal he was a man with a guilty conscience, as was betrayed by his constantly looking back over his shoulder, with his blunt, brown hand screening his eyes—his defective vision missing the horn-rimmed spectacles—as though dreading the pursuing avenger. The bride's father, who was simply a homely-looking mechanic, dressed in his Sunday clothes, wore black kid gloves and puffed at a cigar, with his hat a little a-tilt from his jolly face, which was beaming with parental pride and happiness.

Arrived at the church porch, the party alighted, and the bridegroom's father, after whispering anxiously, had I seen "anybody hanging about," and receiving a satisfactory reply, wrung my hand gratefully, in the same undertone inquiring how I liked his "get up." Encouraged by my approbation, he rapidly informed me that it was all his daughter Kitty's doings, and that as regards fit, she had nothing better to guide her than taking his dimensions with a bit of string.

"But, bless her heart," said the old fellow, his dim eyes kindling, "she's got such a taste, you see. Look how she's turned herself out. When she come down into the parlour,

while the cab was a-waiting at the door, the very young 'un's—Sophy's brothers and sisters—clapped their hands and cried, 'Brayvo!' Enough to make 'em."

I must admit that when I beheld the splendid figure Kitty had made of herself, I could well understand her father's admiration and the raptures of the children. She had modestly concealed her magnificence beneath a dingy "ulster" that descended almost to the ground, the hood of which covered her head; but, the portals of the church passed, she threw it aside and appeared in all her glory. Could this be shabby little Kitty of the old boot and shoe stall at the Leather Lane lamp-post? Kitty of the untidy locks and the old slouched hat, her hands grimy as those of a dust-sifter, and her nose smirched with blacking? It was the story of Cinderella re-enacted. The art of "translating" must have been a born gift in the family. This Kitty—Princess Catherine rather—wore a full-flounced dress of white muslin spotted with green, a *leetle* too womanly, perhaps, for her as regards breadth, but cleverly taken in so as to make it fit at the waist, silk stockings, and shoes of red leather with high heels, each with a rosette in front, in colour matching the spots on the muslin, and as large as a penny of a past coinage. The skirt of the ample frock had originally borne yet another flounce, but this the ingenious young bridesmaid had converted into a scarf, tastefully crossing her shoulders and secured beneath her left arm with a handsome brooch, while a gorgeous wreath of imitation holly with a profusion of red berries—a remnant, doubtless, of an artificial florist's last Christmas stock—encircled her head.

It spoke volumes in favour of the young wood-chopper's choice that she could contemplate her maid's magnificence with approving and unenvious eyes since it put her so completely in the shade. She, the bride, a strapping young woman of three or four and twenty, more pleasant-looking than pretty, wore no other finery than an arrangement of orange blossom in her bonnet and a white rose at the bosom of her sober brown dress. The bride's mother, who was of the party, was a comfortable-looking matron of the hard-working class. Her honest fingers declining to accommodate themselves to the torture of gloves, she compromised the matter, and for gentility sake

grasped the pair she had in her right hand, the unused fingers, new and stiff, sticking out as Jove is sometimes pictured grasping his thunderbolts; while on her bare left hand her wedding ring, worn to the thinness of a golden thread, testified to the many years she had travelled the stony road her daughter was about to tread for the first time.

The bride's two little sisters were there, and her boy brother, aged about fourteen, whose most remarkable characteristics were his unruly red hair and his hob-nailed boots. It was evident that he had fallen violently in love with the dazzling Kitty, and, judging from the varying expressions of his countenance, he might have been turning over in his mind the desperate possibility of presently imploring her to fly with him —the "four-wheeler" was in waiting outside—to distant regions where they might be happy ever after. Perhaps the most noticeable feature in connection with the wedding was the exceedingly unfelicitous demeanour of the bridegroom. Instead of appearing radiant and happy of heart, he was ghastly pale, poor young fellow; his face was that of a criminal whom a jury of his countrymen had just convicted of a heinous offence, and was about to receive sentence for the same, while the stern determination that compressed his lips and wrinkled his brow plainly indicated that he was resolved to bear that sentence with manly fortitude, however frightful it might be. At the same time, however, it might have been, judging from the tenacious grip of his finger and thumb on an outside corner of his waistcoat pocket, that he had secretly possessed himself of some deadly drug, and that it was his intention the moment the judge had doomed him to penal servitude for the remainder of his natural life to whip it out and pop it into his mouth, and so in the presence of his disgraced family make an instant ending of his ignominious career. All this, however, was only his nervousness.

When the proper moment arrived his jealously-guarded treasure was revealed in the form of the wedding-ring, and after he had placed it on Sophy's finger and in sepulchral accents uttered the irrevocable "I will," the burden seemed lifted from his oppressed soul, and he breathed freely again. If there was any one of the company who, from his disturbed and restless behaviour, might have been suspected of being an

accomplice in the supposititious crime the bridegroom had been guilty of, it was the cobbler. From the moment of his entering the church, feeling, I suppose, caged and at the mercy of the enemy, he began to perspire so copiously that the result was plainly visible in the diminishing stiffness of his shirt collar. I do not believe that the old gentleman heard one word of the service. He was constantly engaged in keeping a watchful eye on the distant church door, and in furtively taking a general survey of the building, in search seemingly of a handy means of hasty retreat should what he was in dread of justify retreat as the better part of valour. Once during an impressive portion of the solemn celebration his suspicious glances fell on a female figure, whose bonnet only was to be seen over the intervening pew tops, and who apparently was making stealthily and by a circuitous route for the altar. Instantly his hand was on his hat, and I have no doubt he would have bolted forthwith had I not assured him that it was only the pew-opener.

The ceremony successfully accomplished, we all returned to the abode of the bride's parents, in Windmill Street. It was significant, perhaps, of the sort of life-long voyaging that was in store for the newly-launched Darby and Joan, to notice the matter-of-fact and businesslike behaviour, at this stage of the proceedings, of everybody concerned in the momentous event —the bride and bridegroom not excepted. Anything in the way of poetry or sentiment, involving the utterance of complimentary speeches, or indulgence in tears or kisses, was not for a moment thought of. On our way home (the two fathers and I walked, while the rest went off in the cab), the male parent of the bride, who was a skin-dresser employed in Bermondsey, as he himself informed me, lit the stump of the cigar he had preserved in his pocket, and he and the cobbler entered into an animated conversation as to the relative virtues of British and foreign tanned "butts" and "shoulders," and the state of the leather trade generally.

When at length we arrived at Windmill Street, where the skin-dresser rented a four-roomed house, we found Sophy's mother with her gown-sleeves turned back from her floury arms, and an ample coarse-bibbed apron protecting her Sunday gown from culinary contamination; the bride, in a cotton gown, helping, and the magnificent Kitty, humbly apparelled,

and cheerfully peeling potatoes. There was sherry, glasses, and cake laid out in state in the little parlour, and there was a family gathering round the table while the health of the happy pair was drunk. As an honoured guest, a glass of wine was poured out for me, and the females each had one; but the skin-dresser excused himself on the plea that he wasn't a-going to put himself in misery for the sake of manners, at the same time explaining that he well recollected the last time he was induced to partake of "sherry wine"; it gave him such a pain in his inside that he was pretty nigh doubled up with it for a matter of three-quarters of an hour, and that if it was all the same to everybody, he would take beer, and just a thumb-bit of bread and cheese with it, the cold air of the church having made him peckish. The bridegroom and the cobbler likewise expressed a preference for malt liquor, and our measures being filled, upstanding we drank to the newly-made man and wife in the pre-eminently practical terms proposed by the skin-dresser—"Plenty of health, plenty of work, and plenty of wittles." I should now have taken my leave, but it was insisted that I should stay to dinner.

"And what I propose," says Joe's father-in-law—when, by way of a "thumb-bit," he had disposed of about a quarter of a pound of cheese enthroned on a crusty hillock of bread—"what I propose, since we are scrouged for room here, is that we four go and take a walk in St. James's Park just to get up a appetite, while Sophy helps her mother with the cooking. One jint, you see, sir," he continued, turning to me, "my missus is equal to tackling with any woman breathing; but two jints—and one of 'em being a biled leg of mutton with capers—makes a stiffish job of it, and she'll naturally want help and elbow room."

So we started for our stroll in the park—Joe's father keeping a sharp look-out for the enemy—and on the way, while the two men of leather renewed their conversation respecting "soles" and "uppers," Joe confided to me how promising his immediate prospects were, how every week his firewood business was extending, and how only a few days since he had made a satisfactory "chop" with another man, and had exchanged his donkey for a horse.

"So that you will be able to provide all you require for your home and your wife in a comfortable manner," I remarked.

"That were my aim ever since I made up my mind to hook on to Sophy, sir," replied the prideful young fellow. "No wife going out to work for me. She'll be able to turn up the French polishing now, which it's awful hard work, and have nothing else to do but stay at home and chop wood."

By the time we returned to Windmill Street we found the boiled leg of mutton and the roast beef all ready for dishing, and Kitty and the bride again dressed in their wedding attire. The two male parents, however, and Joe, scorning affectations of state, before they sat down to the banquet, divested themselves of their coats and turned back their shirt cuffs as if about to engage in a job requiring muscular exertion. I will only say of the dinner that it was a complete success, and gave general satisfaction, excepting to one young gentleman—he of the unruly hair and the hobnailed boots, who went to church with us. His discomfiture, however, was due to accident. It was only at the last moment his father discovered that, including the baby, there were thirteen at table, and, in order to arrest the evil consequences attending that fatal number, the young gentleman in question, who had already taken his seat by the side of the object of his adoration, was ordered to remove his plate and chair to the sideboard. It was a bitter moment for him. I saw him covertly brush the unbidden tear from his eyes; but he took substantial revenge on his unkind parents when the plum-pudding made its appearance.

A pipe and a glass of grog after dinner, and then came tea, after that other pipes and grog, and some singing of the homely and old-fashioned sort, seemingly with a careful avoidance of everything of a convivial character, or such as might be construed as being appropriate to the occasion. The skin-dresser gave us "The Ship on Fire," and his wife sang "The Soldier's Tear," which, being encored, was followed by "The Burial of Sir John Moore." Joe sang "The Village Blacksmith," and his wife as much as she knew of "Auld Robin Gray," in which her hob-nailed brother accompanied her on the flute, their united efforts resulting in making us all so low-spirited that it was an immense relief to hear the old cobbler suggest that if somebody would first of all be good enough to go outside and make sure that there was no one hanging about he would try a comic song.

The coast being announced as quite clear, the old gentleman favoured us with a thin and chirping rendering of the "Cork Leg," the effect of which was somewhat spoilt by his singing in a sort of half-whisper, and with his eye on the street door all the time. After which Joe remarked, "Sophy, my dear, it's about time you got your bonnet on," which was the signal for a general break-up. The married couple took their departure with no more affected leave-taking than though they had been man and wife for years, and had just looked in in a casual way; and the cobbler and Kitty presently appeared in their shabby Leather Lane attire, and with the precious bundle hugged under the old man's arm. I saw them as far as their omnibus, and they went their way.

UNDER THE "BLUE BLANKET."

Cant terms for sleeping in the open air—Tag, Rag, & Co. on the way to Ascot—Bedfellows of the "Blue Blanket"—The learned rat—"Put it in perliter langwidge, Billy"—"Rough and tumble" talent of the turf—The correct tip for every race for the small sum of sixpence—"Bouncing" with a "drag"—The flat seller—The art and mystery of "purse-palming."

THE vagabond brotherhood have several slang terms for sleeping out in a field or meadow. It is called "snoozing in Hedge-square," "dossing with the daisies," and "lying under the blue blanket," in distant allusion, no doubt, to the high up azure vault of heaven. That hundreds so pass a night or two is no greater novelty as regards Ascot than any other great race-meeting.

One Monday morning early, on my way to Ascot, I unexpectedly came on a batch of half a dozen who had been lit to bed by the twinkling stars in a pleasant clover field not a great way from Datchet. The meadow in question was screened from the high road, along which I was walking, by a tall, thick hedge. It was a deliciously quiet and secluded spot, no other sounds being audible save the chirping of birds and the humming of bees—the very last place that any of the showmen fraternity would select for a business pitch.

All on a sudden, however, certain sounds broke on the

peaceful stillness, convincing me that, if not an exhibition, a rehearsal for one was about to take place in that immediate neighbourhood. Guided by the voice of a man, I peeped through a convenient gap in the tall hedge, and there, knee high in the clover grass, and thirty or forty yards distant, I beheld a young fellow in what would have been shirt sleeves if the tattered garment next his skin had extended its fringe below his shoulders. He wore a waistcoat and trousers of some sort, and a hard felt cap so crushed on one side as to suggest that it had last served him as a nightcap. He was standing upright, holding in his hands and stroking what at that distance I took to be a kitten. A nimble, upward leap from the man's hand to his ragged shoulder more plainly revealed it, and I then saw that it was a rat.

"You will observe, gentlemen," began the odd figure in the field, after he had cleared his throat for a speech, holding out the re-captured creature on the flat of his hand, "you will observe that I place this 'ere rat on the ground (which he did), and that when I raps on my boosum three times, it makes its way up the leg of my trowsis to be stroked by the hand wot feeds it, which is a proof of its affection and its sag—its sa"—("gacity" seemed to issue from the earth near where the man with the rat stood)—"and its sagacity. Likewise, gentlemen, that is not the on'y trick my rat can perform. He ain't a common animal, bear in mind, but a 'iley eddicated rat. He was captured after a sewere struggle under the floor of a Board school, where he had made his nest, and in which was discovered the mangled remains of five-and-forty mulberry—multi—dash it, wot's that blessed word agin?"

"Multerpication" from the invisible prompter who had once before assisted him.

"Multepercation tables. My rat, gentlemen, can calculate to a ounce the chances of any favourite on the card. Also, gentleman, my rat can give you a charm against losing, so that you won't succeed if you try ever so hard. All you've got to do is to pass him over your shoulder—so—and round your neck—so—and let him climb up into your 'air—in this manner. Then you pops your hat over him, and he'll whisper a tip in your ear that you've on'y got to act up to, and it will bring you in more suv'rings than a bald man's got hairs

on his head. And now we'll put the rat aside, genelmen, which his on'y a bit of by-play to get you together that you may listen to something more pertickler I've got to say to you. How'll that do, Larry?"

I hardly know which was most unexpected, the sudden collapse of the stilted tones of the showman, and his appeal to Larry in his own proper voice, or the startling apparition of the individual invoked, and whose head and shoulders were now seen above the tall grass. Called on for his opinion, he promptly delivered it. He was an old stager seemingly, with a tanned and furrowed face, and hair that soap and water would have rendered white.

"You ask me how it'll do, Billy," said he; "and I'll tell you, plump and plain, it won't do at all. You've got the patter all right, Billy, but you've on'y got it in the rough. It might do all very well for Croydon or 'Am'ton, or any of those common kind of meetings, but it won't go down at Askit; so mark me. You'll have to put it in perliter langwage, Billy. If the patter is all right, the words must be all right too."

"Wot odds about perliter?" growled the man with the rat; "blow perliter."

"Ah, but you can't afford to blow it, Billy, among flash company like you find at Askit, when you want to fetch 'em with a drag. A knife is a knife, ses you, and so it is in a manner of speaking; but a knife wot won't cut ain't no better than a skewer, and you'd better take a thumb-bit and bite at it than 'ack your wittles with a blade wot's blunt, and got no polish to it. P'r'aps you might think that is putting it in poetry," continued the speaker; "but it ain't none the less true for all that. What do you say, Joe?"

On which, and as though his question had conjured them up from amongst the grass roots, not only Joe's head, but the heads of three other gentlemen, started into view, all with tousled hair and bits of grass sticking in it, except one whose hair was cropped too short to admit of any such lodgment. In his case, however, the unmistakable evidence of snail-tracks extending from the nape of his neck to his crown sufficiently indicated that he, like the other five, had passed the previous night among the clover.

Here was a puzzle to be solved. Why the rat, and what

was the business led up to by the by-play, a specimen of which I had witnessed? What was a "drag," and how was "flash company" at Ascot fetched by means of it? Did Larry and Joe, and the rest of the ragged racecourse-bound rascals, each have a rat? or how did they hope to turn a penny honestly or otherwise to-morrow and the three days following? How were they to be approached?

There was one means of self-introduction I had never yet known to fail me in such cases. The universal solace and comfort of a man on tramp, or wherever he may be found, is his pipe. It is in this respect more than any other that his barbarian instinct reveals itself. The savage, whether he be North American Indian, or Asiatic, or African, is miserable without his tobacco, and so is the British vagabond. Nothing was more certain than that had they but a single pipeful of the precious weed, waking stiff and shivering from the damp earth, they would somehow have shared it among them. Again, it was equally sure that the reason they were tobaccoless was because they were utterly penniless. I loaded my pipe with fragrant birdseye, with a prodigal fringe hanging out of the bowl, so that they might presently catch the full flavour of it, and skirting the hedge, presently was sauntering towards them with the wind.

I knew how it would be. It was a "drag" that "fetched" them while I was as yet a long distance from them. They were all squatted up, sniffing like hungry beggars at a cookshop window, when I came up with them.

"Did you ever see a performing rat, mister?" exclaimed the man who had been rehearsing with that animal.

"What can he do?" said I. "Can he chew tobacco?"

"No; he ain't up to that; it would be a waste of 'bacca to bestow it on the warmint if he was able to, when his master is so thundering hard up for a bit," and he produced an empty pipe.

"We're all of us thundering hard up for a bit, if it comes to that," spoke Larry; wheron five other pipes appeared with the hungry bowls turned towards me. There was enough in my pouch for their needs and to spare. A dry pipe is an incentive to meditation rather than to conversation, and the teeth of the unbreakfasted crew were chattering with cold; they did not

require much pressing to take a sip round at my flask. After which I reclined amongst the clover and inquired concerning the rat.

My timely liberality warmed their hearts toward me, and they at once became freely communicative. The gentleman whose familiar cognomen was Billy produced the creature from an inner pocket of his waistcoat, and proceeded to explain to me what I was already aware of—that it was used merely as a draw, or "drag," to get a crowd about him before he commenced real business.

"When you've collected your crowd, you've got something to sell, I suppose," I remarked, glancing round to discover what his stock-in-trade consisted of.

"Summat to sell. Hah! I've got all the blessed customers to sell I can kid to deal with me," laughed Billy. "It don't take much to set me up in business, master, as I don't mind telling you, you being a good sort. A couple of quires of cheap writing paper and a hundred henwelopes at twopence-ha'penny a hundred is all I've got and all I want, if so be as the weather holds fine, and I have any luck."

"But a race-course is a strange place to sell writing paper and envelopes, isn't it?"

"To sell blank paper it would be, but my paper ain't blank; it's writ on," returned Billy. "It's talent wot does it," continued the deplorably ragged rascal, with a grin. And then, as though he had been purposely leading up to the subject in order that he might continue his rehearsal, he rose from the ground, and striking an attitude, addressed the company generally:

"And now that we have got rid of the rat, gentlemen, permit me to make known to you my real reason for soliciting a few moments of your attention. To those who are in the habit of frequenting race-courses, I need not introduce either myself or my purpose, as both are thoroughly well known to hundreds who have been shrewd enough to profit by my information and advice. I will frankly acknowledge that I was not always as I now appear. Time was, and that not so very long since, when I enjoyed the high position of sporting correspondent to a leading London newspaper. If I abused that confidence, gentlemen (here Billy passed a hand across

his eyes and tried to check the rising tear), I have atoned for it. If a few of my former intimates in some of the most celebrated stables in England still are kind to me now that I am down in the world, I am grateful to them. I mention no names—I simply say that I am grateful, since it enables me to gain a few shillings, with the proud consciousness that I am putting pounds, and scores of pounds, into the pockets of those who patronise me. In each of these envelopes, gentlemen, will be found a tip for every race on the day's card, and the price is but sixpence. It is not an extravagant outlay, gentlemen; and take my word you will not regret it, if you show your confidence in me by investing the small sum mentioned, and whatever you win you will have to thank, not me, but those generous trainers and jockeys who stick to their old friend now he's in adversity." To my astonishment the tattered impostor delivered himself of this lengthy harangue with a fluency and grammatical accuracy that contrasted oddly with his ordinary speech, which was that of a decidedly low-bred and illiterate person. Perhaps he read in my face the astonishment I felt, for turning to the aged mentor, Larry, he enquired,

"Ain't *that* up to Dick, my biffin?"

"I never said it warn't," replied the other; "what I said was that you'd better stand on it, and do without the drag altogether if you can't put it into langwidge to match. You go a driving a coach horse and a donkey as a pair," continued the proverbial philosopher, "and you'll find yourself in the ditch, Billy; what do you say, mister?" This was to me, and gave me an opportunity to inquire if I was to understand that the rigmarole about the sporting contributor was merely a set speech he had learnt.

"That's it," Mr. Larry replied, impatiently; "he learnt it same, in a manner of speaking, as the pavement painters learns to draw mackerel and that—by copying. He needn't bounce so much about it."

"He need be good at bouncing," I ventured, "if he hopes to pass as a genteel person out of luck."

"What, cos of my togs, you mean?" exclaimed Billy, briskly. "Oh, don't you make any error; I ain't quite such a lamb at the game as Larry would make out. You won't

know me to-morrow, I shall be so 'spectable. I shall have 'em all on to-morrow—tidy sort of weskit, cuffs, collar, and dicky—all up to the knocker. They're in that bundle all ready," and as he spoke he pointed to a parcel done up in a ragged pocket-handkerchief, and carefully laid aside.

"I tell you what I haven't got, mister," he continued, "and what I ain't got a blessed rap to buy it with, and that's a black lead pencil to write down my tips, if you've got such a thing about you, and can spare it."

I was fortunate in being able to furnish with the required article the gentleman who on the morrow would warrant his ability to put wealth in the pockets of his patrons; and the pipes of the company being by this time exhausted, I served round another ration of tobacco, and the conversation became general. I found that three out of the six had no definite idea as to what would be their employment up on the Heath, and I was further surprised to hear that though they went regularly the round of all the big races, they never had any idea or any settled plan or intention of bettering their condition, and confessed to no other guiding principle than that there is "allus a som'ut to be picked up at the races if a man keeps his eyes open, and there ain't allus a som'ut to be picked up anywheres else whether he keeps his eyes open or whether he keeps 'em shut." The sixth individual of the party, and to whom I have not yet alluded, was a sulky-looking young man with a sneering expression of countenance, who had no more than grunted his thanks for my tobacco, and lay on his stomach smoking it, resting on the elbows of his greasy black coat, and undisguisedly looking his contempt for the others that they should have been led by my small act of good-nature to speak before me as plainly as they had. Turning to him, I enquired,

"And what do you sell?" To which he curtly replied,

"Flats."

Immediately afterwards adding, "That's what all of us do, I'll lay a pound to a pumpkin, for all that some of us are so thundering simple, and don't know nothing."

"What do you want to show a breed for, Joe?" remarked Mr. Larry, I am afraid with a wink of meaning. "Can't you answer a civil question?"

"Who was uncivil!" retorted Joe, waking up at his friend's

hint. "You don't suppose that I meant *he* was a flat? 'Taint likely." Then, addressing me, said Joe,

"I don't know what you are or what you ain't, but I'll wager you're too wide awake to let three half-crowns go past you if you see your way to getting 'em for one. Blest if I don't try you, just out of friendship."

And so saying he took from an inner pocket a packet of new leather purses of the commonest kind, and, selecting one, placed within it three coins that looked like half-crowns.

"It is very kind of you," said I, laughing, "but I've seen that trick before, and won't trouble you to show it me. I tell you what, though; I don't mind giving you half-a-crown if you will teach me how to do it."

"Done," said the purse-palmer; "let me look at your hand." He examined my right hand and felt the ball of my thumb. "I couldn't teach you to do the trick clean if you was to give me a 'at full of half-crowns," he remarked, "because your hand could never kiver the coins properly—like this, I mean," and he instantly conjured the three coins out of the purse into the palm of his hand, where they lay tight-gripped and hidden under the thumb-ball.

"But the job, see you," continued the operator, "is to make a flat feel sure that the money was still in the purse, and that he won't be unless he hears the chink of it and you let him feel it through the purse. Very well, look here. There are two pockets in the purse, and one pocket has always got three ha'pence counted in it. You show the side that is empty and you chuck the half-crowns in—one, two, three; and in shutting up the purse—so—you jerk 'em out again—so; and here they are palmed once more, and if you want to hear 'em chink in the purse and to feel 'em from the outside, you're welcome, for the three ha'pennies ain't never been moved, and they're all you'll get for your half-dollar, you may take your davy."

I paid the promised two-and-sixpence for the interesting lesson in palmistry, and, probably, might have been further enlightened by such an accomplished schoolmaster had we not at that moment been discovered by the grass-minder, and ignominiously turned out of the meadow, at the gate of which we went our different ways.

AT A FOURPENNY GARDEN PARTY.

The tea gardens of the olden times—Love's young dream, and the unromantic necessity for eating and drinking—The modern so-called tea gardens—"Fours" of spiritous liquor—A tea garden east of St. Paul's, and its patrons—Its attractions for working girls, and their sacrifices for it—Which shall it be, dinner, or flowers for my hat?—Vanity wins—The road to the tea gardens not the highway to matrimony—The ugliest blot on the picture—The lampless garden boxes.

THERE is something in the appellation bestowed on that good old-fashioned place of resort, the "tea garden," that, for a sufficiency of reasons, recommends it to public favour. As a garden, it must necessarily be a healthful haven of temporary rest after the long and pleasant walk through country lanes and across the flowery fields and meadows; and in what other little word of three letters is so much of comfort and coziness expressed as in "tea"?

It does not mean merely the invigorating beverage so named. The term "tea" includes, when taken in connection with "garden," the luscious home-made wheaten loaf, the pat of butter bedewed with the milk from which but an hour since it was churned, the freshly-laid eggs, the mellow and streaky bacon rasher, with a farm flavour about it that is sought in vain in meat of a kindred kind purchased of the cheesemonger! The wayside country inn, with its ancient porch overshadowed with a wide-spreading tree, from a jutting limb of which hangs the sign-board, creaking lazily with every vagrant breeze that stirs it, with a sound that, to the dusty traveller who, having slaked his thirst, puts his feet up on the bench to rest awhile, is suggestive of the creaking of the wicker cradle and of rocking to sleep—the wayside inn, I say, is an admirable institution in its way, and despite all that anti-alcoholic crusaders may opine to the contrary, there are many honest folk who, after years of experience, are still prepared stanchly to maintain that, for the thirsty pedestrian whose protracted wayfaring has fairly earned for him the reward of a "modest quencher," there is nothing for the purpose to equal a deliberate and steady pull at a cool and shining pewter measure, filled to the brim with genuine and

unadulterated nut-brown ale. But, without desiring for a moment to dispute the soundness of this time-honoured proposition, it must be admitted that ripe ale, however excellent and deserving the high commendations of those who have attained to manhood's lusty prime, is scarcely the sort of refreshment to be offered without limit or restriction to the rising generation—to mere lasses and lads and sweethearting couples, who are the individuals of all others most likely to betake themselves of summer evenings to suburban regions where the lanes are the shadiest and the grass the greenest. It is for young people that the tea garden, with its flower-beds and the innocent seclusion of its rosy arbours, is such a pleasant convenience. Billing and cooing are all very well. Indeed, taking a retrospective glance from the top of the hill it has taken him fifty years to climb, a man will seldom be able to look back to anything that was more completely to his heart's content than that delightful time when he was privileged to partake of the sweet enjoyment. But billing and cooing are not enough of themselves to sustain the most devoted couple through a long afternoon and a six-miles walk, with the uncompromising prospect of the same distance back home again. "Love's young dream" is not proof against that exceedingly vulgar feeling known as a "sinking," and which commonly, and in the female as well as the male sex, attends fatigue, and the unromantic ailment is to be cured only by eating and drinking. Generally speaking, the means of gratifying such cravings were near at hand. There was the rustic tea garden, with its home comforts and matronly management, and to which any young lady might accompany a young gentleman without so much as an abrasion, let alone a breach, of the proprieties.

Such, at least, was something like the state of affairs but a few years since. How lamentably the suburban "tea garden" has in modern times declined from respectability needs no telling. The reason why would not be easy to explain, or how the evil first crept in, but it is an undeniable fact that, of all the many establishments of the kind that were flourishing wholesomely round about the metropolis a quarter of a century ago, there was scarcely one that did not forfeit its fair reputation, and sink lower and lower, until, at last, it became little better than a haunt of vice and profligacy, patronized chiefly by fast

young shopmen in the habit of taking liberties with the money-till, with dissipated apprentice and factory lads, and their equally precocious and unscrupulous young female companions, whom they either took with them or appointed to meet there.

There was hardly a suburb of London that was not afflicted with at least one of these dens of iniquity. Under the new system it was a profitable business, and there were not wanting speculators of a certain class ready to back up an old scheme or start a new. The old name, "tea gardens," was adhered to, but it was all fudge. Folks who had a sober regard for the tea-pot were not wanted there. The mildest liquid refreshment on draught was bitter ale or stout; but spirits and water was the favourite drink—"fours" of gin or whisky, not much as to quantity, but make up for it in quality: nice fiery stuff that made its effects felt, and set the blood simmering the moment it was swallowed. A stimulant less brisk and potent would not have sufficed to "keep the game alive"—the said game being disporting on the dancing platform, where the band invited, and between whiles retiring in the gloom of the "refreshment boxes," where hovered the cat-like waiters, who knew their business so well they could have gone about it blindfold. Indeed, it came to much the same thing. At length, however, the scandal made such alarming headway that the police authorities could no longer overlook it, and such significant warning was given to the proprietors that, very much to the satisfaction of the outraged respectable inhabitants near whose habitations the gardens were situated, they deemed it prudent to close the gates for good and all.

Indeed, so thorough seemed the extinction of the establishments in question, that it was not until my attention was drawn to a placard making known the fact, that I was made aware than an eastern suburb could still boast of a "tea garden," provided with a band, and a dancing platform so extensive as to accommodate, unless the placard exaggerated its size, several hundred dancers at one and the same time. Refreshments, including ale and spirits, the public were informed, were to be obtained at the gardens at popular prices, and the charge of admission was but fourpence. Making inquiry, I was informed that the place of amusement indicated was extensively patronized by young men and women, especially on Saturday and Monday evenings, the

great majority of the visitors being girls of the warehouse and the factory, and youths and lads engaged in the same kind of industries. On a Saturday evening, therefore, I arrived at the gardens in good time, and, joining the fast-arriving throng, paid my fourpence and passed in.

And I hasten to state, and am much pleased to be able to do so, that a prettier place or one more carefully arranged it could not be easy to find. The flower-beds, the garden-paths, the broad patches of green are all as nice as possible, and exactly the place to which a working man would delight to take his wife and family now and again by way of a rural treat. I am no judge of dancing, or of the perfections of a platform dedicated to that pastime, but judging from the vast number of young females who had arrived there before the band, and who were seated around or lounging in groups of three or four, evidently bent on joining in the fun at the earliest possible opportunity, there could be no doubt that the arrangements in this department were well appreciated. It was as yet early daylight, indeed, and the dancing was not announced to commence until it was nearly an hour later; but the young ladies who, as far as I could see, were not one out of three accompanied by a male companion, must have numbered more than fifty.

Their appearance said much either for the prosperity of the trades they worked at, or for their self-denial in setting aside for dress so large a proportion of their wages, supposing the latter to be moderate only. A keen-eyed critic might perhaps have discovered that in many cases the silk skirts were adaptations from the cast-off dresses of fairer wearers, and that those unmistakably new were of the flimsiest material procurable for money; but there could be no denying that but one fashion prevailed, that being the very latest. But the most amazing part of the display were the feathers these young work-people wore in their hats. It might be that a young lady could not afford herself a pair of kid gloves, and had to make do with cotton ones; or that her once white kid dancing shoes had been cunningly inked to make it appear as though black was their original colour, and to hide their defects and blemishes. These were but trifling drawbacks if the plumage of the ostrich adorned her head-gear. It did not seem to matter much as regards colour or how it matched with the complexion, so that it was large

enough, and it could not be too large. Purchased new, many of the feathers I saw would have cost a guinea and a half at least; but there is a way of managing such affairs.

I remember, a year or two since, and in the bleak winter-time, being one day in the neighbourhood of the City Road, just at the time when the hundreds of persons employed in the warehouses and factories of that busy neighbourhood were turning out for their dinner-hour. There is a paper-colourer's somewhere thereabout, the *employées* being seemingly chiefly females—young girls from thirteen to seventeen. As I passed up the street they came trooping along, and one of them made a sudden halt at the window of a "wardrobe-shop," where there was exhibited for sale a quantity of artificial flowers. They had already seen service, but though considerably crushed and faded, they were still gay even to gaudiness, and they were ticketed "twopence halfpenny the lot." It was evident that the young lady alluded to, who was an ill-clad poor little creature, with dilapidated boots and a miserably thin shawl over her narrow shoulders, was on her way to purchase something for her dinner. She carried in one hand a small yellow basin, and in the other a few halfpence. She lingered wistfully at the flowers, chinking the money in her hand, and as though half resolved to enter the shop and make a bid for them, when just at the moment there chanced to pass another young female, who had already been to the cookshop and was returning with her purchase. She, too, was provided with a little yellow basin, and in it was a small portion of roast pork, together with a liberal allowance of gravy.

The weather was piercingly cold, and the savoury sage and onions flavoured the nipping air with a fragrance such as to sharpen to its keenest a youthful appetite. Seeming to sniff afar off a similar banquet for herself, the girl at the wardrobe-shop window turned from it, though not without one long lingering backward look, and marched resolutely in the direction where roast pork awaited her. But her mind was not so completely and thoroughly made up as she had supposed. From the opposite side of the way I observed her steps abate in briskness as she approached the cooked meat establishment, and when she reached it, instead of going straight in, she paused at the threshold to survey the smoking joints displayed within. In small things, as well as great, it is sometimes curious what

trifles help us to a prompt decision. It happened that, to make a more imposing show of his stock, the cookshop proprietor had a looking-glass at the back of his show-board, and this, besides repeating the viands baked and boiled, showed the factory girl her old bonnet that twopence halfpenny-worth of second-hand artificial flowers would make smart again. It must have been a hard wrench, for where she now stood she was in the midst of savoury odours, but the way to screw up her courage for the sacrifice was to steadfastly contemplate her shabby bonnet, and she did so, till presently she turned about abruptly and faced for the wardrobe-shop again.

There was no hesitation this time. In she went, as though she had never been actuated by any other intent, and after several minutes, spent I have no doubt in an endeavour to bate the wardrobe woman of the odd halfpenny, she emerged with the precious prize in her hand. But she was not satisfied to depart with her treasure and gloat over it in private. She must needs try the effect of the flower in her old bonnet without a moment's delay. There was the gateway of a builder's yard close by, and slipping in here, she sat down on a log, and taking the bonnet in her lap, adjusted the trimming with a dexterity and taste betokening that it was not the first time she had engaged in such a task. Evidently she was pleased with the result; but though the bonnet might look well enough in hand, it by no means followed that it suited the style of her hair-dressing—which, by-the-bye, was highly fashionable—or her complexion. She knew where there was a looking-glass. Pocketing the tiny yellow basin, she put on the renovated head-gear and arranged the flimsy old shawl over her shoulders negligently, and as a young lady taking a walk, she walked with a genteel gait up the street again, and as if by the merest accident looked in at the cookshop window.

But it was no longer a puzzled and pondering little face that was reflected in the mirror. What remained unsold of the baked leg of pork was still there, simmering in its own gravy, and the crispy crackling and the lusciously saturated sage and onion were delightful to behold; but, after all, what where they but fleeting pleasures? The artificial flowers were not. They were things of beauty, and though they could, perhaps, hardly claim to be a joy for ever, they would serve in that capacity for a considerable time. With ingenious contrivance, a month

hence they would still be a source of pride and satisfaction to the wearer, and enable her to carry her head at least three inches higher than any girl of her stature. What was the inconvenience of going dinnerless, compared with the triumph of appearing in that bonnet, when, her day's work being done, she took the arm of the youth of her choice, and accompanied him to the gardens herein mentioned, or any other popular place of amusement?

I do not, however, wish it to be inferred that the majority of young females whom I found at the gardens were of a class as poor as the little heroine above alluded to. As a rule they were older. Many of them, indeed, had so far passed the bloom of girlhood as to suggest the melancholy reflection that, highly as girls of the working class prize their liberty, and great as are the sacrifices they cheerfully make to do justice to it, it does not tend much to help them to a suitable and respectable partner for life. Young fellows do not frequent such places to cultivate sweethearting of the sort that culminates in matrimony. No doubt there are hundreds of silly girls who think differently, but they never did, nor ever will, in all their lives, make a greater mistake or a sadder one. Sad is the word. They might be counted by dozens, these poor jaded-looking women of from five and twenty to thirty,—honest hard-working souls, probably, and sticking to business from morning till evening, but still possessed of the delusion that they are as attractive as other girls of their station, and as likely to discover in the gardens a young man who will take a fancy to them, and after a while approach them with serious and honourable proposals. It is marvellous how their vanity blinds them. Hobbledehoys and grinning louts of seventeen pass them with disdain, or "just for the lark of the thing" stand up with them for a few minutes, for the fun of laughing over their shoulders with their companions, who are similarly amusing themselves. It would not matter so much if these—well, elderly girls—appeared in becoming guise. There is no reason why a female of seven and twenty, if she be that way inclined, should not seek amusement at a public gardens, where dancing is going on; the absurdity of the thing is when she affects the finery of the flaunting young miss of fifteen, and makes a bungling attempt to reproduce, by artificial means, the natural ruddiness that long since has deserted her cheeks, and which is as glaring a

falsehood as the celebrated "peach-bloom" (fourpence halfpenny a box) with which her forehead and her arms are powdered.

After all, however, it is purely a personal question, and if these past-prime belles of the garden can still find fun, or even bitter-sweet satisfaction, in making themselves conspicuous there, he must be a curmudgeon indeed who would begrudge them the poor privilege. And perhaps I was premature with my pity for them. It was only, as I afterwards discovered, while the daylight lasted that the majority sat neglected and forlorn. After dark, when the platform was illuminated and the crowd thickened, and the dancing, though still as decorous as the vigilant M.C. could manage it, became more free and easy in its character, the elderly lasses as well as the young ones found male partners in proportion to the supply of the latter, which was about as one to two of the other sex. There was plenty of mirth and laughter, and not over-much drinking, though, faithful to the advertisement, there was a drinking-bar at which, at moderate prices, spirits and beer were dispensed.

There was only one feature to find fault with, and that, unfortunately, is a fault so grave as almost to outweigh all that deserves favourable mention. The abominable "refreshment boxes" were there, dark as caverns, and as perilous as that in which the maiden-devouring dragon of Wantley made his lair. And this last is an unpardonable and deliberate iniquity on the part of the proprietor of the gardens that cannot be overlooked or forgiven. There was plenty of gas in the other parts of the ground, but the long range of boxes against the garden wall were in such gloom, it was quite startling when a young gentleman, one of the party partaking of refreshment within, ignited a fusee to light his pipe or cigar. A policeman with his bull's-eye lantern would have been a useful person, but, as far as I could see, the owners of the gardens decide to manage their affairs without the assistance of Scotland Yard, preferring to rely on the vigilance and the moral rectitude of their waiters.

UNDER THE YELLOW FLAG.

A popular lodge of the Y. R. A.s—The loquacious potman of the establishment who gave me the "right tip"—A society for the promotion of moderate drinking—I attend a meeting, and don the yellow badge—Speeches in support of the cause—The brick-moulder's challenge—Literature for budding Blue Ribboners—An out-and-out "Yellow" man—The pipe-maker's complaint—His domestic persecution—Killing him with kindness—The gird that at last goaded him to desperation.

"IMPORTANT notice! Members of the Yellow Ribbon Army meet upstairs every Saturday and Monday evening, at eight o'clock. The principal object of the 'Y. R. A.' is to oppose the Blue Ribbon Army, and all tyranny, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness as regards moderate drinking. The 'Y. R. A.' does not advocate intemperance, but that freedom which is an Englishman's birthright, and which should enable him to partake, when he chooses, of the glass that cheers and, unless abused, does not inebriate. Admission free. Discussion invited."

The potman attached to the public house—the "Curly Badger," near the Hackney Road—was mounted on some steps cleaning the windows at the moment when I chanced to pass, and the above-quoted strange announcement caught my eye. He happened to be polishing the particular pane behind which the placard was stuck, so that I could catch only a line at a time as he moved his arms. This caused me to halt so long that the potman presently observed me, and what I was doing.

"That's a warm 'un for 'em, guv'ner!" he remarked, indicating the placard with an approving flick of his duster. "That's coming to the pint, that is. Sport your colours, chuck out your challenge, and if they've got any fight in 'em, let 'em come on."

His familiar and friendly manner encouraged me to make a few inquiries respecting the "Y. R. A.," and whether it was anything else than a joke. He was indignant at the latter part of my question. A joke, indeed! If I had been upstairs in the club-room last Monday night I should have seen the sort of joke it was. If there was one person in the room when it was

most crowded there must have been at least fifty, all of whom were pledged to take a ticket of membership as soon as they were printed, and in other ways acknowledge themselves regularly enrolled. His master, he informed me, had taken the matter up only about a month ago, and every succeeding meeting night there were more and more visitors and speakers.

"Not harf-'arted fellers neither," the potman imparted to me, with a grin that had more depth in it than his words, "but regler staunch ones, who met early, and did not separate until the house closed."

"Drinking all the time, of course?" I remarked.

"Only in moderation," returned the potman, with sudden seriousness. "No mistake about that. Most of them are the proper sort, and what they say they 'll stick to. When they all turn out of the club-room, I 'll wager there isn't one wot isn't fit to walk straight home without anybody doing him a kindness. Mind yer," he added, conscientiously, "I 'm a-talking about how they are as long as they 're up there. If they like to have another drop or two at the bar when they come down, that 's their look-out."

I inquired if there were other lodge houses of the Y. R. A., and to my astonishment he at once mentioned the signs and the whereabouts of three others, at the same time confidently predicting that the time was not far distant when the "yellows" would get such a hold on the sensible portion of the British public that the "blues" would be licked clean out of the field. In short, he told me, one way and another, so much that was curious and interesting that I resolved on the following Saturday night to pay a visit to the "Curly Badger," and find out the advantages of becoming a "Y. R. A."

Eight o'clock was the appointed meeting-time, and though it was barely a quarter past when, unchallenged, I passed up to the club-room where the banded opponents of too rigid temperance assembled, there was already a considerable muster of members. They all wore the yellow emblem. Indeed, an ample supply of the gaudy morsels of ribbon was generously supplied free by the landlord. They were contained in a cigar-box on the centre table for any one to take one that chose to do so. Of the score members that had already arrived more than half were young men or mere lads, but the others were men of

mature years, of the prosperous mechanic and artisan class seemingly, and, judging from their demeanour, quite seriously disposed. Each sat with his pipe or cigar, and his pot or glass before him, and out of which he occasionally sipped in such an ostentatiously moderate manner that I began to think that the gulf that separated "yellow" and "blue" was neither so wide nor so deep as I had been led to suppose.

I took possession of a vacant seat near the chairman, and accepting his civil offer of a yellow badge of the order, together with a pin to pin it on with, at once placed myself on a friendly footing with him. We got into conversation, and he explained to me that personally he entertained no animosity for the members of the Blue Ribbon Army as such. In his opinion, if a man had a liking for tea or any other sort of slop, he had a perfect right to gratify his depraved taste. Only, continued the chairman, let him set about it in a sober and temperate manner. If he must blow his blessed trumpet, let him blow it among those that are of his own persuasion, and not make himself a nuisance to those who have not got any ear for that kind of music. He could not enlighten me as to how the present movement originated. He knew of several publicans who had taken it up on the principle of fair play, and so that the public might learn something of the side of the picture that was not the "blue" side. Malicious and mean-minded people had put it about that the Yellow Ribbon Army was merely a public house dodge to secure an increase of customers; but it was nothing of the kind. It was an endeavour on the part of those who had the real interest of the working classes at heart to make it more generally understood than at present that a British workman could indulge in a social glass and still remain a rational being, with a decent regard for himself, his wife, and his home.

The chairman began by addressing himself in an undertone to me, but discovering that what he was saying was attracting general attention, he gradually raised his voice and addressed the company generally, and so the real business of the evening commenced. By the time his "opening remarks" were concluded and warmly applauded and his health drunk, we were at least five and thirty strong, and it was announced that if any member present had anything to say, now was his time.

Three gentlemen promptly rose in response, but on the chair-

man waving his pipe towards one, the other two sat down. The member in possession of the house did not occupy it for long, however. He had a proposition to make, he said. It wasn't his own, but one his wife had suggested to him, and he did not think it at all a bad one. It was that members' wives be admitted to their meetings. (Cries of "No, no," and laughter.) Why not? If they really were in earnest in practising moderation in their drinking, it would be better for them if as many people as possible, and especially their wives, were able to convince themselves that there was no humbug about the business, and that——

But at this point the speaker was rendered inaudible by derisive laughter, and by cries of "Sit down!" and "Shut up!" and he resumed his seat.

The speeches that followed were of a homely character, and somewhat monotonous, nor could it well be otherwise when they were all based on the one foregone conclusion that any man who could so far forget himself as to become a "blue-ribboner" was a milksop, and altogether unworthy the confidence, or even the acquaintance, of a man that was a man, and who unmistakably demonstrated it by standing up through thick and thin for John Barleycorn. There was one individual of bulky build and a suspiciously pimply countenance, and who was, I was informed, by trade a brick-moulder, who was possessed of a novel and brilliant idea, and which he propounded with great satisfaction to himself and his audience. The brick-moulder's were precisely of a pattern with those of the potman before-mentioned: "Sport your colours, chuck down your challenge, and fight it out." His suggestion was that the proper way to settle the question all round as to which was the better man—the total abstainer or the moderate drinker—was to make a match of it of so many on each side as represented the principal businesses and amusements of life, and prove their prowess one against the other. The speaker was in favour of some large and convenient building, such as the Agricultural Hall, being hired for the occasion, the price of admission to the general public to be one shilling, and the whole of the proceeds to be given to the men who showed themselves to be the best in a fair field and no favour, and the side—the blues or the yellows—that scored the greatest number of chalks to hold social sway for ever after, the other side

to be forthwith put down and extinguished beyond the possibility of resuscitation. It does not require much space to epitomize the brick-moulder's sagacious proposition, but being anything but a fluent speaker, and afflicted with a hoarseness of utterance, and also with hiccups, his rigmarole outlasted the patience of the company, and while he was in the midst of his catalogue of subjects that should constitute the great test programme, cries of "Time!" and the rattling of pots and glasses brought him to a standstill, and he scowlingly quitted the room, but not before, indignant at the insult that had been put on him, he had banged two half-crowns on the table and flung his cap on to the floor, at the same time offering to fight the chairman for the amount mentioned if he would favour him by coming outside.

By this time it was growing towards ten o'clock, and though as far as I could observe no person present had overstepped the bounds of moderation, each time a member raised his liquor to his lips the measure was somehow emptied much more quickly than at the earlier part of the evening, and the two waiters were as busy almost as though it had been an ordinary drinking bout. Much amusement was created by one young gentleman, who produced a book of what he said were Blue Ribbon Army convivial songs. With questionable taste, though with some humour, he favoured the company with a specimen or two, tacking to each verse a "tooral-looral" chorus, which was taken up by everybody with great heartiness and spirit. The singer was vociferously encored, and I believe that at this early hour all graver business would have been shelved in favour of harmonic entertainment had not the chairman, in a neat speech, delivered with some severity, reminded them of the purpose that had brought them together.

Speechifying was forthwith resumed, the individual who next claimed the attention of the room being a fierce-looking little man with a shining bald head and spectacles, through which, in his virtuous indignation, his eyes glowed like burning coals. He, like the speaker that preceded him, held in his hand some printed matter, but nothing so frivolous as a comic song was in store for us.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed the little man in a tremulous voice, "I hold in my hand an example of what, in my opinion, is the

most pernicious part of this Blue Ribbon business. What gets over me more than anything else is their enlisting mere children into the service, preaching to 'em and persuading 'em whenever and wherever they can get a lot of 'em together on the quiet, and poisoning their young minds against the ways of their parents. But they don't stop at water, gentlemen. They encourage disobedience and, vulgarly speaking, cheek on the part of childhood towards even grey hairs, by means of print. This I hold in my hand, gentlemen, is a penny magazine devoted to the teetotal cause, and I will read to you one or two of the precious anecdotes contained therein for the improvement of the infant mind. The first one is headed 'A Promising Young Soldier.' A little boy, a member of our Army, was asked the other day by his father to fetch a pint of beer from the public house. 'Which jug shall I take, father?' said the child. 'Why, the proper one, of course,' replied his parent. The boy brought the jug, and at the same time a small hammer, with which he dexterously knocked a hole in the bottom of the earthenware measure. 'There, father,' he remarked, with a look full of meaning at his misguided parent, 'that's the proper jug to fetch beer in!'"

Murmers of disgust ensued on the reading, but the little bald-headed man checked them by flourishing the paper, and remarked,

"Hold hard, there's something here that's better than that. 'Father,' said a merry young rogue of five summers to his parent, whose nasal organ was highly inflamed through long intimacy with the grog-glass, 'why is it that you have no whiskers?' 'Because, my son,' replied the father, 'nature never gave me any.' 'I am glad to hear that,' returned the cute little fellow; 'I thought, perhaps, at one time you had whiskers, and the heat of your brandified nose had scorched them all off." I don't know how you feel about it," continued the irate 'Y. R.,' "but I rather think that if either of those nice little fellows had belonged to me, and played me such a trick, he would have found it much easier to stand up than to sit down for a considerable time afterwards"—a sentiment that was heartily applauded by every one present.

The next speaker was a gentleman who had already attracted the attention of the company towards him by attempting to

catch the chairman's eye. Failing in the attempt, he had audibly expressed his disgust that some fellows should have all the jaw to themselves, while other fellows wasn't allowed to get a say in, edgeways even. The individual in question was undoubtedly entitled to a hearing, if only on account of the conspicuous display he made of being heart and soul devoted to the Yellow cause. Not only did he wear the society emblem pinned to the breast of his waistcoat, but a silk neckerchief, evidently brand-new, of a bright orange hue, encircled his throat, and in a buttonhole of his coat he sported a yellow dahlia that for size, if not for beauty, might have taken first prize at a flower show. Finding at last the opportunity he desired, he rose to his feet pale with excitement, and so disturbed with conflicting emotions that he found it necessary to steady himself by holding on by the edge of the table. When the thumping of tables and the jingling of glasses had subsided, and the chairman had encouragingly adjured him to "fire away," he proceeded to do so, going straight to the point at once.

"Gentlemen," said he, "being a pipe-maker by trade, I'm a man that finds malt liquor, and, perhaps, now and then, a drop of something short, agrees with me. I haven't come here to make believe to spout on principle, because that's a thing I don't believe in. I come here because I was drove here." (Murmurs and incredulity.) "Yes, gentlemen, believe me or believe me not, I ain't going to eat my words, and if I chew 'em over a bit it's because I've been aggravated to it. So I say again that I've been drove here. I've gone in, as p'r'aps you might have noticed, for something more than a morsel of yallow ribbon—I've gone in for a yallow silk neck-handkercher, which I bought on purpose this afternoon, and likewise I wear a flower of the favourite colour. Why do I do it? Because, I tell you once more, I am drove to it. Why? says you. Not by my conwiction that it is my duty to'rds my neighbour so to do. If I owe my neighbour any duty, let him come and ask for it, and he shall have it, and not before." (Several "Hear, hears" greeted this expression of manly sentiment.) "No, gentlemen; I am drove to do what I'm now doing by my own son-in-law." (Murmurs of sympathy and a pause, during which the pipe-maker soothed his choked utterance by taking a pull at his

pint.) "By my own flesh and blood, gentlemen, or leastways next door to it.

"What for? says you. Is it because that there son-in-law of yours is a drunkard, and you seek to shun his ways by joining them that are pledged to moderate drinking? No, gentlemen, he's not that. He's wuss. I've told him so to his head five and forty times, and I'd tell him so again if he stood before me this minute. He's a Blue Ribboner." (Groans.) "He lodges along of us, having our parlours, and he's made my home a wretchedness." (A Voice: "Why don't you kick him out?") "If you hadn't been in such a blessed hurry to put your spoke in you would have heard why not without asking," continued the pipe-maker severely. "I don't kick him out because all the family cling to him. His wife, my wife, young George wot's apprenticed, the very gal—all the whole kit of 'em cling to him. It's only lately. It isn't more than four months ago since my son-in-law became a 'blue.' Before that we used to take our pint together all manly and proper, and I'd see him home if he had a drop too much, and he'd see me the same, happy as the birds in the air. But, all of a sudden, he took it into his head to become a 'blue,' and that happiness is all over."

"They try to convert you, I suppose?" remarked the chairman.

"They do so," returned the pipe-maker, with a defiant chuckle which ended with a hiccup; "not by violent means, mind you; I wish they went that way to work 'stead of the other. They try to get at me with the meek and unreproaching dodge. They're all as amerble and resigned to'rds me, bless you, as though I was a bad complaint that had got among 'em, and which not being able to be cured must be put up with. It's all my son-in-law's doings. He's made Blue Ribboners of the blessed lot of 'em, and one's just as bad as the other. No matter how much the wuss I go home, nobody don't sulk or jaw at me. They sing at me, that's what they do. I've been that wild with 'em sometimes that I've gone home a staggerer, and no mistake, and meaning to have it out with 'em. But they won't have it. 'Poor, poor man!' the missus says, when she opens the door, and they all get round me with faces long as fiddles, offering me all manner of hacts of kindness, just as though I'd had a accident—been run over, or something of

that—and then they strike up. Not as though they were doing it on purpose, and it was me they was getting at, but while they're going about the house in the or'nary way.

"The artfullest, cussedest things some of them temperance songs is, you'd never believe—in the tunes, I mean. There's one that goes to the tune of The Cork Leg; it was only this afternoon I was swindled with it. I'd had a little drop, and when I got home they started singing it. 'Hallo!' thinks I, 'this is better; they're coming round to sensible ways at last.' And to give 'em a bit of encouragement I joined in. All of a sudden my son-in-law, along with his wife, comes running into the kitchen. 'Give me your hand, father,' he ses; 'this is indeed a joyful time. Oh, what a happy change to hear you joining in one of our temperance songs!' 'But,' says I, 'The Cork Leg is not a temperance song; it's as much more t' other as any I know of.' 'Ah! the tune is the same, but the words are very different,' he ses; 'what we were singing wasn't The Cork Leg —it was The Drunkard's Doom.'"

And, cheered by the now hilarious company, the excited pipe-maker could have continued the story of his domestic grievances for another hour at least; but just then the landlord looked in to say time was up, and he was about to lower the gas.

VEILED MYSTERIES.

The sausage of the past and the present—The great Epping sausage forgery case—The spy, the waggon, the fraud brought to light—Horseflesh in sausage material—The pork butcher of Leather Lane—Popular prejudice and suspicion—The blindfold horse lowered into the cellar—The sausage-shop stormed—The mistake discovered—The sausage-maker of Old Ford gives me some information that the reader may find useful.

With a liking for the sausage, home-made as well as imported, there has always been present to the mind of the consumer an uncomfortable suspicion respecting the *bonâ fides* of the veiled delicacy. Indeed, from time to time, so rudely has the confidence of the sausage-eater been shocked, that it would not have been surprising if he had sternly resolved to have nothing further to do with the doubtful envelopment.

A quarter of a century since, as now, the sausage commanded a large share of popular patronage, and in poor neighbourhoods the commoner sort, known as "best beef," and retailed at fourpence or fivepence a pound, was exhibited in rosy strings, and served as the useful and ornamental festooning of the shops of many cheap butchers. But then, as now, there were fastidious folk who turned in dismay from the "veiled mysteries," and marvelled how it was that their unrestrained consumption was not signalized by a marked increase in the death rate in those localities where the demand for them was greatest. Not that they—the fastidious ones—were so deeply prejudiced as to avoid all prepared meats assuming sausage shape. If they could be quite sure as regards the origin of the article, they could enjoy a sausage as well as any one. It was all right, for example, if it could be warranted as coming from Epping. The simple-minded country people dwelling in that rural district knew nothing of the villanous devices of the unscrupulous skin-stuffers of the slums of London. Their pigs were pastured in the leafy glades of the great forest near at hand, and the pork they yielded was of the luscious beech-nut flavour so much admired by the consumer.

It must have been owing to this natural advantage that Epping became famous for its pork sausages. No one could in any

other way account for the proud distinction that attached to the little village in question. It is nothing uncommon for a place otherwise insignificant to become noted on account of some special production. Everton boasts of its toffee, Banbury is world-renowned for its cakes, and Stilton makes a stand on its cheese, and is in no danger of being dislodged from the proud eminence. Epping was famous for its sausages. True, they were somewhat expensive, but then they were genuine. There could be no question as to that. They were forwarded to London daily by waggon—a broad-wheeled wain, with a russet-coloured awning, a pair of farm horses in the shafts, and for a teamster a pippin-faced countryman, in a snowy smock-frock, and with turnpike tickets stuck in the band of his battered old beaver hat. The quantity of sausages he brought away each morning from Epping was limited. It was never more than about seven or eight hundredweight, and unless shopkeepers ordered them beforehand they could not be supplied. So matters continued to the satisfaction of all concerned, until it occurred to an individual of an inquiring turn of mind to go down to Epping and view the famous and extensive factory from which the sausages came. No one in the village, however, could give him any information on the subject. The village pork butcher was in the habit of making a few pounds twice a week, but they were commonplace, mottled-looking affairs, and no more to be compared with the delicate dainties forwarded to London daily by the waggon than chalk is like cheese. It was a mystery, and the man with the inquiring mind resolved to sift it. He took lodgings within a mile or so of rural Epping, and he waited for the waggon. At last it appeared, pippin-faced teamster, russet awning, and all, jogging Londonward; but when the inquisitive one peeped in over the tailboard, lo! the vehicle was empty!

He kept it in sight for a few miles, until it halted at a wayside inn where there was a stable-yard, and already there awaiting was a London cart, harnessed to which was a good horse that looked as though, early as it was, it had made a long journey and drawn a heavy load. There was the load in the cart, packed in scrupulously clean wicker baskets, each one lettered on the lid "Warranted genuine Epping sausages." While the waggoner and the cart-driver were busy transferring the freight from one vehicle to the other, the inquirer glanced at the name on the

shaft of the London cart, and made it out to be that of a notorious cheap sausage-maker whose business premises were situated in Smithfield. Seeking further information, he discovered that for years past the cart and the waggon had met every morning at the same spot, the latter to "load up," the former to be unladen. I do not for a moment desire to insinuate that Epping was in the least responsible for the barefaced imposture; indeed, I am informed that really excellent sausages may be obtained there. I am speaking of what happened five and twenty years since. Never again after that startling discovery was that white-smocked waggoner seen in the early morning urging his jog-trot team towards London, and for a long time afterwards "real Egging sausages" were a drug in the market.

There was nothing in the incident, however, calculated to interfere with the demand for the common sausage among its more humble adherents. It was no news to them that the chief centre of sausage-making was Cow Cross, or that the meat used in the manufacture was not of first-class quality. That, however, was of no great consequence. All that the consumer stipulated for was that the materials should be derived from the ox, the sheep, the calf, or the pig, and that on no pretence whatever should equine meat be allowed to mingle with it. They were always scrupulously particular on this point, and at that time more so than at present, if possible. It is curious the unconquerable repugnance even the very poorest of the lower class have for horseflesh, and how quickly their fury is aroused if they have cause to suspect that the same is being foisted on them for ordinary beef.

It was some time after the Epping exposure that a respectable pork butcher, whose business premises were in the neighbourhood of Leather Lane, Holborn, narrowly escaped serious damage, without in the least deserving it. The worthy tradesman had a large concern in the cheap sausage line of business. He had succeeded somehow in exactly hitting the taste of the inhabitants of the crowded locality, and the low price at which he supplied the savoury food caused his shop to overflow with customers. The demand was so great that the day was never long enough to prepare a supply, and from midnight until morning the gas was seen burning in his underground cellar, where was kept the chopping machine, the clattering of which was

unceasing. It was too large a machine to be kept in motion by means of manual labour, and it was customary for the pork butcher to employ his horse for the purpose; but that animal falling sick, he was glad to borrow a horse for the purpose of any neighbour who would kindly lend him one. The only way by which bipeds and quadrupeds could descend from the back shop to the cellar was by the use of an inclined plane of planking, to which were nailed cross-pieces for the sake of firm foothold, and it was by this means the borrowed horse was lowered to the scene of its nocturnal labour.

But soon an ugly rumour got abroad. It was whispered that Blank, the butcher, used horseflesh in making his sausages. A dozen witnesses were ready to take oath, if necessary, that returning home late at night, and passing through the alley at the rear of Blank's premises, they had seen a horse being smuggled in—a strange horse, and not in the least like Blank's own. They had seen it blindfolded and dragged down to the cellar, where, without doubt, it was slaughtered, and its carcase disposed of in a way that was too obvious to be for a moment questioned. One witness had seen a grey horse being dragged to its doom, another a roan, a third a brown; but he whose testimony created the greatest amount of indignation and horror—though it would be difficult to tell why—was a man who was prepared to make solemn affidavit that, on the Wednesday night previous, he had spied a bony old jet-black horse, that had evidently seen long service in the funeral carriage line of business, being dragged to death, with a view to mincing its flesh to fill sausage skins. When it came to this the appalling whisper rapidly grew to an ominous growl, and it was privately planned that Blank's place should be watched that night, and that an attacking force should be awaiting in readiness to inflict summary vengeance against the rascally sausage-maker if the heinous offence he was charged with could be proved against him.

The scheme was followed out. Two trusted conspirators were posted at a window overlooking Mr. Blank's back premises, and about one in the morning they hurried to their friends with the intelligence that another horse had been consigned to the cellar for sacrifice. A white animal this time, and one to the skin of which they could swear in the event of their arriving too late to discover it whole and alive. An exasperated com-

pany of women and men, armed with bars and bludgeons, and thirsting for vengeance, hastened to the pork butcher's premises, and storming the cellar door, burst in on the amazed sausage-makers, and on the old white horse, who, attached to the shaft of the chopping machine, was slowly performing the task it was hired for. On which, without staying to explain or apologize, the mob beat a hasty retreat, and, excepting that there was a pair of hinges and the lock of a cellar door to make good, no one was the worse; for what threatened to be a serious riot ended in a joke. The various animals seen descending had merely taken their turn at working the sausage machine.

Nevertheless, and although the pork butcher of Leather Lane was able so convincingly to refute the wrongful suspicion that was roused against him, the public mind was not then or since set at rest as to the possibility of the flesh of the horse finding concealment beneath the integument that professed to enwrap only wholesome sausage meat. The moment there gets abroad a rumour that such an outrage against popular prejudice has once more been attempted, then, at least in the lower circles of society, the matter is as eagerly discussed as though the most diabolical attempt against the public health had been discovered and frustrated.

It was so quite lately, where a tradesman, residing at Old Ford, and professing to be a manufacturer of "breakfast sausages," was pounced on in the midst of his alleged iniquity by the sanitary inspector, and accused of introducing horse meat into his mincing mill. A veterinary surgeon was present in court, and proved to the magistrate's satisfaction that the material objected to was of equine origin, and a fine of twenty pounds was inflicted on the concoctor of matutinal dainties, who, with his son and several workmen in his employ, denied on oath that the meat in question was other than ox beef, and though possibly "poor" in quality, yet not unfit for human food. The evidence was conflicting: on the one side it was broadly insinuated that persons engaged in the defendant's trade commonly used horseflesh, as being cheaper than any other; whereas on the other side it was declared that, even if it would be of any pecuniary advantage to the manufacturer to use horseflesh, he could not do so, in the first place because of the objectionably high colour of the meat, and, in the second place, because it was peculiarly "shy" of

taking salt, and no material that would not do so freely was of the least use to a dried sausage-maker. A third reason might have been given, but it was probably thought not worth while to mention it in open court, viz., that the diet on which the "harmless necessary cat" feeds is worth more in the way of legitimate trade than is obtainable for much of the meat that the sausage-maker may use with impunity.

This is not a savoury subject, but it is one in which a great many people take a curious interest, while many others who have a partiality for the sausage, British or foreign, would be glad to learn whether their confidence in it has really been abused, or whether they may without danger continue to indulge with impunity in their favourite delicacy. It occurred to me that it would not be time thrown away to proceed to the neighbourhood of Old Ford, where many sausage-makers have manufacturing premises, and make some inquiry into the matter among those who would be most likely to know all about it.

I am glad to be able to state that—having spent several half-hours in the company of as many separate witnesses, all of them employed at different manufactories of "germans," "collared head," and "spiced beef," chiefly for supplying shops situated in the poorest and most densely populated neighbourhoods—as far as I can make out, there is at present no danger that our feline pets will go hungry because of the wholesale conversion of their favourite food into sausages. The many *employés* I interviewed were encouraged to speak plainly and without reserve; and, unknown one to the other, they all agreed in the assurance that to their knowledge the "gee-gee" dodge, as they called it, was seldom or ever practised by their masters—the main safeguard for the public being that it was impossible to bargain with any one for a regular supply. Horse slaughterers, according to the terms of their licence, are strictly prohibited from permitting the meat to leave their premises in an uncooked state, and already prepared as feline or canine food, and in that condition it was of not the least use for any purpose an Old Ford manufacturer might feel disposed to put it to. The only men he could deal with were the "flying knackers" or horse-butchers in a small way, who now and then, and at uncertain intervals, buy a horse for killing or already dead. I was further informed that it would be no "catch" for those who "got up" the cheap

"germans" if they were permitted to use horse meat, since the wholesale price of it was a shilling per stone of eight pounds; while "very good stuff for the purpose," and that to which no sanitary inspector would be legally justified in objecting, could be purchased for a very few halfpence per stone more. And when I ventured to remark that it seemed impossible that meat wholesome and uninjurious could be bought at such a price, I was coolly told that "anyhow, all the actual meat there was in say half a pound of cheap German sausage, couldn't do any one much harm if it was ever so 'dicky.'"

"'T ain't as though it was all meat. Only enough meat is used to give the stuff a foundation," explained a hoary-headed "machine-man" of many years' experience. "There 's lots of things besides meat—meal and all manner, and then there 's the 'colouring' and the spice."

"What kind of spice?" I inquired; and his reply reminded me immediately of the confidential revelation made by the street pieman to Mr. Samuel Weller, in "Pickwick."

"That entirely depends on what name your sossidge is going under," said he. "It is one spice for one sort, and another for t'other. It is all the same meat, don't you know; but the spice regulates it to the palate."

"What I wish chiefly to know," I remarked, "is, whether the ingredients used for the purposes we are speaking of, and in a general way, are any of them injurious to health?"

"All I can say, in answer to that," said he, "is, that I have been a machine hand going on now for seventeen years and under eight or ten different makers, and I never knew one that used horse meat or turned out goods that I myself could not sit down and cheerfully eat a slice off 'em."

I was glad to hear such favourable testimony from such a source. If that old machine-man spoke the truth, the sausage-eater may take heart and continue to munch his "german" with a relish.

THE FISH AND THE RING.

Amongst the Hastings fishermen—Their primitive proceedings—Shoring the fish, and how it is disposed of—The luck of the mackerel—I make friends with Joe Hornbeam and go for a night on his trawler—The mysteries of the cabin—Mr. Hornbeam enlightens me as to his domestic economy—A "cast" and the fish that came up with the trawl—For the first time in my life I eat fried sole—The night's work and its earnings.

I DON'T know how they manage such matters on other parts of the British coast, but at Hastings the fishery business—at least, as far as applies to the transfer of the finny spoil from the catchers to the dealers at first hand—is conducted on delightfully primitive principles, and which seemingly are as satisfactory to all parties concerned as they are sound and simple.

To a Londoner, a stranger to the place and to the system, this is the more striking considered in contrast with the shrewd manœuvring and adroit double dealing to which even the humblest denizen of the deep is subject on its arrival at Billingsgate. Hastings is a by no means unimportant contributor to our fish supply. This was demonstrated no longer since than last June, when the Prince and Princess of Wales honoured the thriving Cinque Port with a visit. The sturdy fishermen attached to the place number at least a couple of hundred, and their fleet makes quite an imposing show. With their wives and families they must reckon more than a thousand individuals dependent on the luck, good or bad, that attends the patient industry of these patient toilers of the sea, who bestir themselves for work when the sun is setting, and return to shore when other men, brisk from their beds, are preparing for the labour of the day. The work of many busy hands and so many miles of net result, as a rule, in there being tons of fish to be disposed of immediately on its being landed, a small portion being allotted for local consumption, but the bulk to be presently consigned to the railway vans in waiting, and thence conveyed by train to London.

But any one visiting the "first hand" market expecting to find bustle, and excitement, and clamour, and competition, will

be disappointed. No matter what sort of weather may prevail, the bargaining all takes place on the open beach. The wind being favourable, the boats return from their night's venture about five in the morning, lying a convenient distance off shore, and shortly afterwards the buyers gather on the strand. Row-boats fetch the catch from each smack as far as the water's edge, when the fish is transferred to great baskets, which the fishermen themselves bring higher up the beach, and shoot down in a heap. Sometimes there will be half a cartload, at other times not more than might be easily wheeled off in a hand-barrow. The buyers gather round in a ring, men and women, tip-toeing over each other's shoulders, and then comes along the auctioneer, who, when the heaps are many, has a busy time of it. He is not in the least like a London auctioneer, and has neither hammer nor rostrum; neither does he wear a tall hat or a black coat. He is as much like a fisherman himself as can be, and he carries in his hand a small account book and a black lead pencil. He does not waste time in expatiating on the size and excellence of the soles or mackerel he has to dispose of. He puts his foot in the heap and gives it a stir up, so that the buyers may not be misled by big fish being artfully placed atop, and then he exclaims,

"Now, how much for 'em?" starting at a price that is a trifle above current quotations, and diminishing it until a buyer snaps at the lot. "How much for 'em? Seventeen shillin, sixteen six, sixteen shillin, fifteen six?"

"Aye," says somebody in the crowd, at the same time paying down the money, and the transaction is at an end, the buyers making for another heap which had been accumulating while the last was being disposed of. And as every lot is "cleared" within a few minutes of its being knocked down, in a couple of hours or so the whole fleet of boats are disburdened, and the tired fishermen, jaded and sea-soared and scaley from their night's work, are at liberty to go home and get their breakfast.

But they have not all equal reason to be satisfied. One might suppose, on such an exceedingly broad field as the ocean presents, that it would be fair to all, and no one would be favoured more than another. While I was there, however, I overheard a remark that convinced me that such was far from being the case. "Hows'ever you been doing?" a woman asked

a mackerel-fisher. "Fust-class," was the unenvious response. "They brought ashore eight hundred, which 'll pay 'em a pound a man; and we kep so close alongside 'em all night that our nets were now and agen like to foul, and we brought in less than four score—about two shillings apiece for us." I got into conversation with him, and he informed me that, bad as it was, it was possible to do much worse than he and his mates had done on the preceding night, and that not unfrequently he was out every night the whole week, though earning no more than twelve or fourteen shillings. Sometimes, but rarely, a good haul was made, and, with a run of luck, a man might earn as much, perhaps, as thirty or five and thirty shillings in a week; but set against this was his dead losses, chiefly on account of accidents to the net, the screw steamers often crossing the extended length of buoyed-up gear, tangling and tearing away part of it. This has to be made good by instalments deducted from the earnings of the crew, and it will happen at times that a man will have a debt of several pounds, hampering him and keeping him poor for many weeks. It was all a lottery, and like all other lotteries, he added, good-humouredly, there were very few fortunes made at it. As regards himself, he had been at it, boy and man, wellnigh fifty years, and was content if he was able to earn, summer and winter, a clear seventeen or eighteen shillings. Was trawling more profitable than herring or mackerel-fishing? Much about the same. It was all luck. His son Jack was in a trawler, and his average earnings were pretty much the same as his, the father. Would there be any difficulty in my going out for a night in a trawler? Not a bit of it. All I had to do was to look in any afternoon at the Three Porpoises, and ask for Joe Hornbeam, and the matter might be settled offhand.

I gladly adopted his suggestion, and in the afternoon visited Joe Hornbeam, and arranged for a trip that very night. At the time appointed I made my way to the beach, and may here mention that before we started one puzzling characteristic of the fisherman fraternity was cleared up to my satisfaction. I had seen the men on the Sunday morning congregated at the little church used exclusively by them and their families, and there was nothing particularly striking in their appearance. The majority of them were hale and hearty-looking fellows, with much

of rough-and-ready manliness in their demeanour, and an expression of cool resolution in their eyes that bespoke them as being equal to any peril of their craft they might be called on without a moment's warning to strive against. There were a few present whose "rig" was of the ordinary "blue-jacket" kind, with a black silk neckerchief, and low shoes; but, for the most part, the male portion of the congregation adopted a more homely costume, the material of which was bark-tanned canvas, and which, together with their brown hands and weatherbeaten faces, gave them, as they sat quite still, intently listening, and with their eyes fixed on the preacher, very much the appearance of life-size images in terra-cotta; but, however attired, it was evident that their stature was not beyond the common—certainly they were not even of ponderous build.

This on the Sunday; but when I moved among them next evening on the beach, where they were mustering to make ready for a start for sea, I was amazed to find how they all had increased in size. There was one individual of the terra-cotta kind I had particularly noticed at church on account of his patient endurance. He was accompanied by his wife, who was a stout woman, and occupied so much of the seat that there was not half enough left for him at the extreme end of it. It seemed as though she could have weighed against him for a wager and won it, even though she made him an allowance of three or four stone. But now, as I beheld the man, I should have hesitated to say which would have turned the beam against the other. Nor was his an exceptional case. Within six and thirty hours the same marvellous amplitude had been attained by all of them. They moved with a lumbering action, and their bulk and weight caused the shingle to crunch audibly beneath the heels of their enormous sea-boots. It was impossible that the wonderful alteration was attributable to natural causes. With an arduous night's work before him, the fisherman would probably fortify his inner man as far as was consistent with comfortable stowage, but that he could eat and drink sufficient in the time to increase his bulk to such an extent was out of the question.

The mystery, however, was one that admitted of a very simple solution—the seeming accession of bulk was entirely due to the prodigious amount of clothing in which the men attire them-

selves before they set out for the night's business. I will not say that the discovery caused any diminution of my esteem for the patient and industrious toilers of the sea, but it certainly altered my opinion as regards their hardy indifference to personal comfort. My idea, and I believe it to be that commonly entertained, was that the fisherman aboard his craft and in pursuit of his avocation was as lightly attired as any other sailor. On the contrary, he could not wrap up more carefully if he was constantly threatened with rheumatism, and it was necessary to envelop himself in the most formidable kind of fortifications to withstand the attacks of the enemy. His faith in flannel knows no bounds. How I came to know of it was owing to my not being able to find Mr. Hornbeam on the beach and to my calling at his house. He was expected home every moment, his wife told me, and when he did come he wouldn't be five minutes putting on his things, for there they were all ready laid out for him, and as she spoke she pointed to a bunk against the wall, where there was a pile of woollen and cotton clothing enough to fill an ordinary clothes-basket. I took the liberty of making an inventory of the various articles, and they were as follows: One shirt of grey flannel, one ditto of striped calico, one woollen guernsey, one thick cloth jacket, one long tanned canvas smock frock, and an enormous oilskin "overall," capacious enough to cover a man, when the neck lappets were raised, from his ears to his ankles.

This was sea-going covering for Mr. Hornbeam's body. He was even more solicitous as regards his legs. For these he was provided, first, with a stout woollen pair of ordinary socks; then, with a pair of "pants" of a like material, and which descended to just below the knee; then, with a pair of trousers stout as Witney blanket; and over these again, to make all right and tight and comfortable for his sea-boots, a pair of heavy worsted stockings that reached as high as his thighs. I should not have been so much surprised had it been depth of winter, but for a night in July it was difficult to understand how Mr. Hornbeam could perform his aboard-ship duties so encumbered. It was sufficient for the present, however, that my eyes were opened as regards the men's extraordinary increase of bulk; but I was yet to be made acquainted with other mysteries of fishercraft, not the least of which, to my thinking, were the arrangements made

for the domestic comfort of the crew on board the *Lively Matilda.*

From stem to stern the trawler so named measured probably five and twenty feet, her middle space being a receptacle for ballast, and next to it forward there was a well and tank into which the fish is thrown as it is caught. In front of this again was what, from its size, I took to be a cupboard or locker for spare ropes and odds and ends, until I observed what looked like an iron chimney sticking out of the top of it, and inquiring of Mr. Hornbeam, was informed that it was the "cabin." And as he spoke he pushed aside a sliding lid about as large as the seat of a chair, and, lowering himself into the hole, disappeared.

"Come down and hev a look at it," came up from the chasm. "Put your hands on the ledge and gi' me hold of your feet, and I'll guide 'em. There you are, and a cosy little place it is in rough weather, I do assure you."

I needed not his assurance as to the smallness of the below-deck snuggery, for endeavouring to stand upright when my feet touched the floor, my head came in violent collision with the ceiling, and when Mr. Hornbeam had lit a candle I discovered that the same accident would have happened, though perhaps in a mitigated degree, had I been a foot less in height. In length the cabin may have measured eight or nine feet, its breadth at the widest part may have been seven, but at the bows it contracted to less than four feet, and from floor to ceiling was a depth of certainly not more than a yard and a half. But it is amazing what can be accomplished with the exercise of a little ingenuity, combined with a disposition to make the best of things. In this dingy little hole there was accommodation of a kind for the cooking of meals and the partaking of them; besides which, there was a couple of sleeping-bunks and stowage for cooking utensils and various articles of crockeryware, with a coal-box and a water-barrel, a bread-pan, a large can containing turpentine, and a cooking-stove. I particularly noticed the can, because, with a stick projecting from the bung which stoppered it, it stood within a foot of the stove, in which Mr. Hornbeam set about making a fire, and the unpleasant reflection occurred to me that, in the event of the smack giving a heavy lurch, and a few blazing coals spilling out on to the cabin floor (and there was nothing to prevent), the turpentine would no doubt play an

active part in promoting a conflagration. I remarked to Mr. Hornbeam that I should not have thought that a fire was necessary on a craft such as his; to which, with the bellows on his knee, he turned to me with a pitying smile for my ignorance, and replied that he rather fancied I should alter my tune if I was a fisherman.

"You might be able to do without it nights such as these," said he; "but wait till the winter's set in, and then see if you wouldn't be glad of the comforts a bit of fire brings you. Come down here off deck when it's slippery with ice, and there's half a foot of snow laying on it, and your hair is froze as stiff as wood sticks, and then you'd know what a thing to be grateful for a jug of coffee is, all piping hot out of the coffee pot."

He further gave me to understand that the crew were provided with food—with bread and butter and coffee and sugar, but not with meat. That they had to catch.

"Do you like fried fish?" asked Mr. Hornbeam. And on my replying that I was fond of a fried sole when it was properly cooked—adding this saving clause in case I should be compelled to decline to partake of the rough-and-ready produce of the frying-pan I saw stowed in company with the fire shovel and poker in a corner—I think he must have noticed my dubious glance in the direction mentioned, for he remarked, with some tartness, that if it came to "properly," he didn't suppose I had ever in my life eaten a sole that was properly fried, and never would, but for an opportunity like the present.

"Wait till you've been on deck for an hour or two, and got an appetite for your supper, and if I don't make my words good I'll undertake to swaller the frying-pan," he continued, returning quickly to good humour.

We were now several miles from the shore, and it was a dark night; but with no other light than that which was given by the single candle in the lantern that hung against the mast, the men went about their work as though it were broad daylight. Their trawling-net had been put out long before, and, with the aid of a windlass, they now began to haul it up. It was a tedious operation, occupying several minutes; and when at last the net appeared at the surface and was hauled aboard hand over hand, until quite a large heap of it was accumulated, and at last there was the "catch," consisting of much "muck" and

weedy tangle swept from the sea floor, and about a couple of buckets full of fish of various kinds leaping alive, and many of them gleaming with rainbow colours in the lantern-light.

It was not much of a take as regards quantity, but it included at least a dozen pair of fine soles, and Mr. Hornbeam seemed satisfied. Mainly on account of his vanity, I believe; for as soon as the nets were cleared and cast out again he selected half a dozen of the fish in question, and remarked, "Just you stay up here and smoke your pipe till I call you down," retreating with them to the cabin. In about a quarter of an hour he put his head out at the trap-door in the floor, and announced that supper was ready, and I joined him below. There was triumph in his eyes, and his broad brown face beamed with pride as he handed me a specimen of his cooking. In appearence it was unlike any fried sole I ever had set before me. It was curled up head to tail, and it had evidently been cooked in its skin, and it was dry, and of a rich crispy brown. So much as regards its appearance: its flavour I will not attempt to describe. It was simply delicious. It was a fish of fair size, and with a slice of bread I ate the whole of it, without the exchange of a word between us. It was not until the bone was stripped, and only that and the head remained on my plate, that Mr. Hornbeam remarked,

"Well, now, was I right or was I wrong?"

"You never was farther from wrong in your life," said I.

"Then hev another," said Mr. Hornbeam; and I did, and ate it with a keen relish to the last morsel.

We went on deck again soon after, and hauled up the trawl again, and with a little more luck than at first, though not much, and again we cast out and again we hauled in until an hour after daylight, when we made for home in sight of a dozen other boats coming in from all quarters. We had not had what might be called a successful night. Indeed, Mr. Hornbeam's share and two of his mates' of the proceeds amounted only to three shillings a man; but they went away to breakfast cheerily. Well they might, when every night of their lives they can sup off soles fried as *they* were.

MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS.

The man with the "cheeses" at the ship-chandler's shop—"Will you buy a couple of life-buoys cheap?"—No use keeping them in stock, nobody will buy them—Opposition to life-buoys by mates and captains—A life-buoy agent pitched overboard—The marvellous story of little Jack Bailey and of his life-buoy that saved him from the shark—The pickle merchant who uses more cork than is required for all the life-buoys and belts in the kingdom.

I was in the neighbourhood of Wapping one Saturday, at the shop of a ship-chandler. It was growing late in the evening when there came in a needy-looking man with something bulky in a canvas bag, which from its shape, and connecting it with chandlery, I took to be cheeses. But it was only for a moment that this idea possessed me. It almost immediately occurred to me that a couple of cheeses of at least two feet diameter and about six inches thick would weigh about half a hundredweight, whereas he with the bag, who was a little old man, carried them quite lightly in his left hand. I was not long left in doubt, however.

Addressing the worthy chandler, he began, "Can I persuade you, master, to buy a couple of——"

But the other took the words out of his mouth—"A couple of life-buoys? No, thanky," said he, impatiently; "I've had the last one I bought of you on hand this three months."

"It ought to have sold, too," replied the life-buoy man, despondently; "it was a very good one, I remember."

"I daresay it was, but that don't make a ha'porth of difference. Good or bad, people won't buy 'em." And then, turning to me, he continued, "I do assure you, sir, strange as it may seem, that if I was to offer the article we are speaking of to the first seaman that passed on his way to his ship at a quarter what it cost me, it is twenty to one against his buying it. I'd lay forty to one, if the conditions were that he carried it openly in his hand through the streets to where his vessel was lying."

"And why should he object to be seen carrying so useful an article through the streets?" I asked.

"Because," returned the ship-chandler, "he wouldn't like to run the risk of being jeered and laughed at."

"By the landsmen, you mean, of course?"

"No, I don't. I mean by sea-goers. More likely than not, if a seaman was seen with a belt or a buoy, his own shipmates would chaff him more unmercifully than any one else. Ask this man here. He can tell you more about it than I can."

"I was just about to remark to him," I replied, "that I should have thought a much readier way of disposing of such goods would be to deal with those who need them at first hand —to go down to the docks and aboard the outward-bound vessels, and offer the buoys or belts to the crews and to the passengers as well."

The life-buoy maker was a sad-looking old fellow, but he grinned at this last observation of mine.

"I think if you tried it once, sir, the chances are you would fight shy of the experiment ever after," said he. "I know them that have tried it and been sorry they did. Some of the captains and mates even are dead set against life-buoys. You would think, by the way they treat any one who makes an attempt to introduce such things on board their ships, that they were inventions for drowning people instead of saving them from drowning. They'll cuss and swear at you something awful, especially them in the coasting trade, who you'd naturally think would be more glad than any one to have a belt or a buoy by 'em. 'Be off!' they'll say, 'unless you want to be pitched over the side. We want something that will make the men stick to the ship when she's in danger of going down, not such darned things as them to encourage them to give you the slip when you're most in trouble.' And you'd be lucky if you didn't have something shied at you if you didn't get off the vessel as quick as you could.

"They ain't particular how they serve you if they're of the rough sort, and only last year a man I know, in my own way of business, he went aboard a ship that was lying in the London Docks, not to try and sell a buoy, but to take one to one of the crew who had bought and paid for it, and just as he got on deck he met the second mate, who was one of the unfeeling sort I'm speaking of, and who up and spoke to him so pleasant that the man thought he was going to do a stroke of business with him. He asked the price of the buoy, and handled it, and wanted to know what weight it was calculated to keep afloat in the water,

'Could it keep you afloat, do you think?' he asks him, quite affable. 'I'd take to it as comfortable as going to bed,' says my friend, 'if there was occasion.' 'Then here goes to make you comfortable, you confounded Mother Carey's chicken,' says the second mate, turning all of a sudden fierce on him, and chucked him into the river and the buoy after him. Course he only got a ducking, and was able to scramble ashore, but even such little things as that pints to the sort of spitefulness there is amongst those who are prejudiced against life-buoys. But it isn't everybody who is so foolish," he hastened to add, as though suddenly bethinking him that, under the circumstances, the little anecdote was neither judicious nor timely; "sensible going voyagers buy 'em and are glad to. I wouldn't press these two on you, master" (this to the ship-chandler), "but, to tell you the truth, I'm hard up, and don't see my way to getting over Sunday. Don't say you won't buy 'em till you've had a look at 'em." And so saying he withdrew from the bag a couple of life-buoys of full size, and apparently well made and finished. "I'll warrant that they are made throughout of solid cork," said he, "and if you'll kindly take them off my hands, you shall have the two for fourteen shillings."

"Yes, they are cheap enough, but they are no use to me. I can't sell 'em, so I won't buy 'em."

"Look here, now," persisted the other persuasively: "say you'll buy 'em, and I'll take half a dozen tins of meat, beef and mutton, in part payment."

But the ship-chandler was still obdurate.

"When I say no I mean no," said he. "You won't coax me to lumber my shop with a class of goods there's no demand for if you talk from now till next week. So you are only wasting your time." He was convinced at last there was no hope, so with a lengthened visage the poor life-buoy maker replaced his rejected ware in the bag and went his way.

The ship-chandler would have permitted the subject to drop as being too commonplace to be worthy of further discussion, but for me it had a more than passing interest. I should no more have thought, had I required such an article as a life-buoy, of looking out for somebody who was hawking it about from shop to shop, then of going to a Brummagem jewellery bazaar to purchase a gold chronometer. One might reasonably sup-

pose that of all things in the world an apparatus, the only use of which is to preserve a man's life in the last extremity, should be guaranteed by a responsible maker. The saving virtues of a life-buoy must depend wholly and solely on good workmanship and on the quality of the material used in its construction. And without for a moment wishing to depreciate a humble industry or to insinuate that a manufacturer on a small scale is not as capable of producing goods in as excellent quality as are turned out of extensive wholesale premises, to my thinking it would be a safeguard and a satisfaction if the precious promise of saving me from death by drowning were stamped with the name of some firm of high repute.

The two buoys I had seen were canvas-covered, and a purchaser had only the seller's bare word that they were interiorly composed of the "best cork." But when a trade falls so low as to include among those who work at it poor fellows such as I had just now seen, and who was willing to sell at a "slop" price—to take tinned meat (presumably for the Sunday dinner of his family) in part payment—it is far from impossible that the hard-up manufacturer might be tempted to use some rubbishy substitute for cork, which would treacherously sink with the drowning man who trusted to it. I put the matter to the ship-chandler in this light, and his reply was that, as far as he knew, the man I had seen was honest enough, and might be trusted. He had heard of so-called life-buoys being stuffed with rushes and with waste cane, but he had never handled them. At the price the man had offered the buoys he might, perhaps, get as much as three or four shillings for making them, and the two would be a long day's work. He was what was called a garretmaster, and always made up his goods and disposed of them in the way I had seen. There were not many engaged in making life-buoys to hawk about; but if there were half a dozen, that was six too many. The regular manufacturers—the wholesale people—could very well supply the demand there for such things — a hundred times over, in fact, if they had orders for them; but there was no call for them or for cork belts either worth speaking of. Put it roughly that five thousand persons—seamen and emigrants—left the port of London daily, on short or long voyages, and he, the ship-chandler, could lay a pound to a shilling, if it could

be proved, that not more than one in a thousand were provided, on their own account, with either life-belt or buoy.

The ship-chandler spoke like one whose knowledge of the subject justified his expressed opinion, but I was loth to believe without further inquiry that he had not somewhat exaggerated the facts of the case. I must confess to having a kindly regard for life-buoys. It dates back now some sixteen years—to the time, indeed, when the mail steamers, the *Wye* and the *Rhone*, with many other vessels, were completely wrecked in a terrible hurricane off the Island of St. Thomas. On that occasion a life-buoy was marvellously instrumental in saving a little lad who was one of the few survivors.

When the ship was dashed to pieces on the rocks, and the suddenly engulphed crew were struggling in the troubled waters in the midst of splintery wreckage, little Jack Bailey, who was clinging to a frail spar, saw at a short distance off an able seaman who was breasting the waves with the help of his life-buoy. Jack was doing his best to make towards the man, when all in a moment the latter uttered a shriek, and throwing up his arms, his body slipped through the buoy. The waters thereabouts abounded with sharks, and the probability is that the man was nipped off at the waist by one of those rapacious monsters. Anyhow, it was an accident by which the cabin-boy benefited. The now empty buoy was drifted towards him, and he managed to slip his head and shoulders through it, and to secure the lashings to his body. But the storm still raged, and he was carried out to sea, and at length, buffeted and benumbed, he became insensible, and knew no more of the matter until many hours after, when he was roused to consciousness by his naked body rasping against the shingly beach. I met young Jack as he was landing from the *Douro* at Southampton, his only luggage being the precious buoy that had so miraculously saved him, which he was taking home as a present for his mother. We went with two others of the rescued crew, and had a quiet little dinner at Morgan's Hotel, where Jack told me his story; and, bearing out the truth of it, there on the yellow paint of the outer canvas was the impress of the back of Master Bailey's head and his hair where it had rested, while, senseless as a log, he was beating about in that sharky ocean. And it is worth mentioning in connection with the unaccountable negligence manifested by

seafaring folk to provide themselves with a cork float, that of the whole crew of young Bailey's ship only seven were saved, and of these four swam ashore with life-buoys on their bodies.

In order to ascertain how far the astonishing statement the ship-chandler had made was correct, I paid a visit to the largest manufactory of apparatus for life saving at sea; and it scarcely needed more than the very first remark made by the head of the firm in answer to my question to corroborate my first informant.

"You may guess," said he, "how little in favour life-buoys and everything of the kind are in every branch of the sea service, and, I may add, the river service as well, when I tell you that with all our business transactions with the shipping interest, including Admiralty and Trinity House, the Board of Trade, the Royal Humane Society, the Thames Conservancy, and the Royal Lifeboat Institution, our annual receipts from all these various sources do not amount to more than one-half of our yearly account with one of our customers—a pickle merchant—for bottle-corks and bungs."

Questioned as to the foolish fear of being "chaffed" that prevailed among seamen as regards their including such simple life-saving apparatus in their ordinary equipment, he replied that what I had been told was exactly true. He informed me, moreover, that he had caused it to be made generally known that the firm were prepared to provide as many cork belts as might be required for any vessel; to supply handy chests to stow them in; and to send some one each time a ship returned to port, to overhaul the chests, and make good all necessary repairs, at an uniform charge of one shilling per belt or buoy per annum, and in not one case in fifty had the offer been accepted, the chief objection being the strange one that all such contrivances had a tendency to make passengers unnecessarily anxious and nervous, and to foster timidity in the crews. They are, it is said, tempted to abandon a vessel, when, if they knew that if the vessel were lost they would undoubtedly be drowned, they would be induced to use their utmost endeavours to stick to her to the last; whereas, according to the simplest teaching of common sense, a crew would certainly have greater confidence and cooler courage to stand by their ship until her last chance was gone, knowing that her sinking did not necessarily involve theirs also. The sailor who, on joining his ship, took with him

with his other traps a cork belt, would lead such a life on its account among his shipmates that probably, for peace and quiet sake, he would be driven to pitch the objectionable article overboard.

It was the same years ago even with the lifeboat crews. It was regarded as contemptible among the dauntless fellows who manned such craft to wear the jackets provided for them, and it was not until considerable loss of life in consequence had taken place, and the authorities insisted that on no occasion, even when merely out for practice, should a lifeboat man put off without wearing his cork jacket, that the humane provision was universally adopted.

I was sorry to hear that the same unpardonable apathy prevails amongst those who are responsible for the safety of steamboat passengers on the Thames. When, nearly five years since, the *Princess Alice* went down off Woolwich, and more than six hundred lives were sacrificed, the shocking occurrence stirred the heart of the country with a thrill of horror, and as with one voice the people asked why all such vessels should not be compelled to carry, in some shape or other, life-preserving appliances sufficient to keep afloat their full complement of passengers, should they be in danger of drowning. The prompt answer given by those accustomed and competent to deal with such matters, was to the effect that there was no reason at all why such humane provision should not be made; that such contrivances existed in the handiest possible forms, and that, at the expense of a very few pounds each, every passenger-carrying steamer plying on the river might be secured against the possibility of such a catastrophe as attended the loss of the great saloon steamer.

I was shown a Parliamentary Blue Book—bulky enough almost to contain a full list of all who have been drowned since the commencement of the present century—full of the evidence of experts and witnesses who were examined by the Commission appointed; and the upshot of it all was, it was strongly recommended that immediate steps should be taken to make it compulsory on the proprietors of river steamers to provide every vessel with ample life-saving apparatus of an approved pattern. Just about the same time the *Eurydice* capsized in a squall, and all hands were lost except two, and of these one wore a life-belt

and the other was supported by a buoy. This, of course, strengthened the popular conviction that it would be nothing short of criminal negligence to defer carrying out, forthwith, the suggestions of the *Princess Alice* Commission of Inquiry. But there have been no river wrecks of any great importance since, and the alarm and excitement subsided. After all the fuss and commotion, nothing at all has been done, and it is next to certain that, in the unfortunate event of a crowded Thames steamer suddenly sinking in mid-river to-day, the percentage of lives lost would be quite equal to that which made so memorable the disaster above mentioned.

LEFT IN A CAB.

The night cabman—The story of his lucky windfall—The order of the blue ribbon—Shabby behaviour of people who leave property in cabs—The narrative of the unlucky find—The passenger to London Bridge Railway Station—The precious little box left in the cab—The treasure taken to his house by the finder—No advertisement—No reward offered—An anxious time—Resolve to break open the box—The snake, the mouse-hole, and the mother-in-law—A horrible state of suspense—A cruel blow—The advertisement at last—The double disappointment.

WHAT with the boisterous wind and the icy-cold driving rain, it was no more than common humanity dictated that, when after a six miles ride I arrived nearly at midnight at my residence, I should ask the weatherbeaten cabman as I paid him his fare at the open door if he would step inside and take a glass of something warm. He was an old fellow, and the reek of rain had saturated his grey whiskers and polished his red nose so that it looked as though it had been newly varnished.

But his spirits were not in the least depressed on this account. Civilly touching his hat, he opened his cape, and by the light of the hall lamp disclosed a blue ribbon pinned to the breast of his coat.

"I 'm werry much obliged, sir," said he, laying a finger on the ribbon, "but I 've declared off drinking. But if there was such a thing as a cup of coffee in the way, now——"

"If you will wait for five minutes you shall have it."

"So I will, and thanky sir," he replied; "and meanwhile if you don't mind I 'll kiver up the mare." And there was a curiously comical twinkle in his eyes as he added, "we master cabmen ought to make it a duty to take care of our cattle, don't you see, sir? if it is only by way of setting a good example to the drivers."

It so happened that there was "coffee in the way," so that he did not have to wait while it was being made; and while he sat sipping it I asked him how long he had been a cabmaster. The twinkle came back immediately, as he made answer, after a pause, as though to be exact as to the exceedingly remote period in question,

"I have been a cabmaster, sir, ever since last Thursday week. But I'll tell you another thing," and he continued, as he chafed his nose with the teaspoon, as though it was the best joke in the world, "if anybody had said to me last Wednesday week—which was only the day before—What do you think of having a four-wheeler and a couple of horses to call your own to-morrow? I should have made answer 'It's just about as likely that I shall be made Hemperor of China,' which, mind you," said he, growing suddenly serious, "wouldn't have been an unnatural answer for a man at my time of life to make, since it is not every day, by a long way, that a new cab and a pair of horses, and two new sets of harness, falls, in a manner of speaking, from the skies, now is it?"

"I suppose you mean that they became yours in the way of an unexpected windfall, as it is called?"

"They were left in a cab, sir; leastways, that was what you might call the key of it," he replied. "There wasn't any romarnce about it. A gent, he hailed me in the Strand, carrying a black bag, and says he, 'Drive to the Angel at Islington.'

"When we got there I couldn't make anything of him. He was in a fit or something. But being not very far off, I drove him straight to St. Bartholomew's, where they took him in insensible. There was nothing in his pockets to show where he lived, so that I might have known where to take the black bag, and let his friends know what had become of him; so I took it over to Scotland Yard, givin' 'em of course, my number, and my name and address.

"Well, sir, three days afterwards I got a letter from a house in Eaton Square to go and get a reward for the bag, and there I found the very gent I took to the hospital, and a lady as well. 'You did a humane act, cabman, in taking me to Bartholomew's, and you probably saved my life, in fact. But I may tell you that it was perhaps as well that you was not aware of the great value of what was contained in that bag. I don't say you would have been tempted to dishonesty,' he says, 'but I have caused inquiries to be made about you, and have ascertained you are only a poor cabdriver, and the opportunity for appropriating a great sum of money might have been too much for you. I have discussed with my wife the most suitable reward to make you,' says he, 'and you will find it in the mews, to which a servant

shall conduct you.' 'What you will find there is your own, on this condition,' says the lady. 'You know what this means?' and she showed me a bit of blue ribbon—this bit. 'Well, mum,' I says, 'as I understand it, wearing it is all as one with taking the pledge.' 'That is so,' says she. 'Will you promise to wear it with that meaning? You may be able to guess,' she says, 'why I make this condition with you?'"

"And were you able to guess?"

"Well, I was never much of a one at riddles," replied the old cabman, with some degree of embarrassment; "but I suppose that when they set on somebody to make inquiries as to my private character, they had heard as how I now and again took a glass more than was good for me. But that's all over now. I've give my word as a man, and I'll keep it, sir. I promised that I would never touch beer or spirits again unless it was by the doctor's orders, and the lady herself pinned this bit of blue ribbon where you now see it. Then I was took round to the stables, and there was the new cab and the two horses just as I've told you, with the harnesses all complete—everything, even to a new whip—all ready to take away there and then. And if you don't call *that* a lucky windfall, I should like to meet with the one that comes up to your way of measurement."

The rain not abating, he had another cup of coffee, and the conversation naturally turned on property left in cabs, on cabs in general, and on instances which, during his cab-driving career of seven and twenty years, had come under his own observation. I was glad to find that he was of opinion that the comparatively recent arrangement which secures to a cabman a certain per-centage on the value of all goods left in his vehicle, and voluntarily deposited by him at the police office, worked well, and was commonly the means of restoring property to the proper owner, where otherwise it would have been appropriated by the finder. He thought it not only encouraged the men to act honestly, but what, to his way of thinking, was equally important, it was a check on the amazing meanness that possessed some people. By way of illustrating the last-mentioned view, he mentioned a few cases within his own experience, one of them being the finding a diamond bracelet in his cab after he had set down a customer he had conveyed from the Adelphi Theatre to St. John's Wood. He did not discover it until he

reached the cab-yard, and made haste first thing next morning to the house, losing a day's work in consequence, and receiving for his honesty the handsome remuneration of half a crown. On another occasion he found a handsome silver-mounted umbrella with the owner's name and address engraved on the handle, and it coming on to pour with rain as he was carrying it home, he took the liberty of using the article for his own shelter on the way, and when he arrived at the residence of the person it belonged to he was soundly abused for presuming to take such an unwarrantable liberty, and his remonstrance was cut short by the door being slammed in his face.

"But the most unlucky 'find' that ever fell to my share," continued the old cabman, "was the first one I ever came on. I hadn't been driving more than nine months, and I 'd been married about half that time. We were living in two rooms, and things were a long way from rosy with us. Hardly a month previous I 'd been pulled up and wrongfully fined forty shillings for running into a brougham, as well I recollect, for it was in the dead winter-time, and I had to pawn my overcoat to help raise the money. Well, one day I was driving, empty, through one of the squares in Clerkenwell, and was hailed from one of the houses to take up a fare. There was a plate on the door, 'So-and-so, Diamond Cutter and Dealer in Precious Stones,' and the rider was an old gentleman, with a couple of trunks, and he wanted to be taken to London Bridge Station and go somewhere by rail. A servant brought down the trunks, and a little mahogany box about the size of a cash-box, which she placed atop of them in the passage. 'Will you have 'em inside or out, sir?' I asked him. 'You may put the portmanteau outside,' says he, 'but I 'll take possession of this, thank you,' and at the same time he gave me a look as much as to say, 'You wouldn't wonder at my taking care of it if you knew what it contained.' More than that, just as I was driving off, a lady — his wife I suppose she was—came to the door, and calls out quite anxious, 'You 've got the small box all right, my dear? For goodness sake don't trust it out of your hands.' 'It isn't likely,' said he.

"I mention these little things so that you may understand the sort of idea they gave me of what must be the value of that small box. I was, as I have already told you, precious hard up at the time, and I couldn't help thinking to myself, if it was mine it

would just about set me up for life. Well, I drove him to London Bridge, and we were only in bare time to catch a train he wanted to travel by. It was in the evening and quite dark, and there had been a block on the bridge, and he was out of temper, and in a mighty hurry when we reached the station for fear he should be late. A porter took the luggage off the roof, and my fare jumped out in a hurry with a rug over his arm and a paper parcel in his hand, and paid me my fare, and it wasn't till I 'd lost sight of him in the station that I found he had left the little wooden case behind him.

"Of course I didn't want any telling as to what I ought to have done, but it was such tremendous temptation I couldn't resist it. I drove straight home with it, and showed it to my missus. It was a strange sort of box, with one of them patent locks on it, and with a lot of little holes not bigger than pinholes in the top of it. It was pretty heavy, but we couldn't make anything as to what was inside of it when we shook it, which we accounted for by its being likely that the precious stones—the diamonds, or whatever they were—were wrapped up in soft wool; we knew that there was wool in the box, because my missus poked a hair-pin in at one of the little holes and fished out a bit. Well, she was for me taking it to Scotland Yard or back to the house, but I was still feeling riled about that forty shillings I 'd had to pay, and, to tell the truth, I didn't feel in a very honest frame of mind, and I says, 'No, old gal, I mean sticking to it, just at present, anyhow. If it 's as good as I think it is they 'll be glad to offer a spanking reward to get it back without asking too many questions.' So we locked it in a drawer in our bed-room.

"And before I go any further I must tell you something else. My wife's mother was the widow of a market gardener down Hounslow way, and being very old—very near eighty—she had just retired from the business, meaning to live on the money she got for it the rest of her days. It was a tidy little sum she had, and as she was shaky we naturally was anxious to make friends with her; especially as she had no other children to leave it to but my wife and her brother Joe, who was a scheming sort of chap, and a jolly sight better off than we were. We didn't know at which place the old lady meant to come to for a few days when she arrived in London, ours or Joe's; but the very day I got hold of that precious box she wrote and said she was coming

to us. It put us about a bit, because we had only the one bed-room—we didn't have any children then—but it was worth our while to make shift for a few nights, anyhow, so we got the room ready for her.

"Well, one, two, three days passed, and we didn't hear anything about the precious box, and when I came home the third night—the old lady from Hounslow was expected every minute—I made up my mind to break it open. So we locked the bed-room door, and I got a hammer and a chisel, and presently the lid sprung open, and in an instant—like a streak of lightning—there slicked out of the box from amongst the wool, and off the table and on to the ground, the most horrible-looking little snake I 've ever seen or read about. It wasn't very large—not longer than a full-length tobacco-pipe, and about as thick as my thumb, and with its eyes like two sparks, and its fangs darting out of its mouth. It wriggled along, while, struck all of a heap, we stood looking at it, and then down it went clean out of sight through a mouse-hole just by the fireplace.

"It was an awful disappointment, and placed us in a nice sort of predicament; and to crown it, just at that identical moment a cab drove up to the door, and the missus's mother arrived with her boxes. We were taken so aback for the moment that we didn't know what was the best to do. We had written to the old lady that we had got a bed-room all ready for her, and we couldn't do anything else than show her to it; but I made a hasty arrangement with my wife that as soon as she had got her things off, and was in the other room having a bit of supper, I would take up a floor-board or two, and have the varmint out somehow or other.

"But here we were balked again. She didn't want any supper, she said; she was very tired, and would go to bed at once, and give us no more trouble than to light a fire in the room. So she went to bed, and the missus and me were in a pretty funk about that cussed snake. We hadn't the least idea in the world what were the ways and habits of such creatures, so I went and borrowed of a friend of mine a book on nat'ral history to try and find out something about 'em. There was a lot in the volume about snakes that we didn't understand, and a lot more we didn't want to know about. But we dropped on one bit of information that was a staggerer. Snakes of all kinds, it

said, were fond of heat, and in the winter-time if they were in the neighbourhood of a fire they were always attracted towards it, or they would creep anywhere where they could find warmth.

"Everything seemed against us. As I've already told you, the mouse-hole it escaped down was close by the hearth, and the missus was in a rare fright on her mother's account. The dread that haunted her was that as soon as the old lady put out her candle and it was dark, the snake would make its way out to warm itself at the fire, and that, as soon as that died out, feeling cold again, it would go crawling about the room in search of a place where it could coil up snug for the night, and very likely glide in under the bed-clothes. If we had had another bed-room we would have explained matters to her, and had her out; but she was a queer-tempered old soul, and very likely, if we had said anything to her about poisonous snakes under the floor-boards, she would have declared that it was a cock-and-bull story to get rid of her, and gone off in a huff, which was the last thing we wanted; so I persuaded the missus to chance it. The only bit of comfort we got out of reading the book was that it told us some small snakes were poisonous, while others were quite harmless. Which sort our joker was of course we didn't know, and we could only hope for the best. We sat up all night in the next room, listening to the least suspicious sound, and I got an awful stiff neck kneeling down at the old lady's room door, with my ear at the keyhole. But as far as we were aware the snake didn't come up.

"But next morning we had a scare. I hunted over the newspaper as usual, to see if there was any advertisement concerning the box, and sure enough there was one this time. I recollect the words of it as if I had only just now read 'em:

"'To Cabdrivers.—A small mahogany box was left in a cab that conveyed a gentleman from —— Square, Clerkenwell, to London Bridge Railway Station. If returned within two days of the present date, a reward of ten shillings will be paid for its recovery. The box, which is locked, contains a small snake of a deadly poisonous species. Therefore the person who may have the box in his possession is earnestly warned against attempting to open it.'"

Well, of course, after that we couldn't do any other than tell the old lady all about it, and get her out of the room as soon

as possible. She cut up rough about it, just as I expected she would. It was no thanks to us, she declared, that she hadn't been bitten to death by the horrible reptile. She wouldn't stay another hour in our house, but had a cab fetched there and then, and took her luggage and went off to my wife's brother Joe's place, and there she died before she had been there a month, leaving him all she had to leave."

"And what, after all, became of the poisonous snake?" I asked him.

"What became of it? Why, that was the most riling part of the whole business, sir. I didn't like to miss the reward after all the trouble I'd had with the confounded thing, so I had up the floor-boards, and finding it was still there, I paid a rat-catching chap I was acquainted with half a crown to capture it and put it back into the box again, and I took it back to the address at Clerkenwell, making up a story as I went along that I had kept the box all safe and sound until I saw the advertisement, and that, happening at the moment to have it in my hand, I dropped it in a fright, and that was how the accident happened. That was the crammer I told him, and furthermore, in hope that he might spring a few shillings more than he had offered, I piled it up a bit, and told him that, being in the room when the reptile escaped, my mother-in-law was frightened almost into a fit. On which he laughed, and said it wouldn't have done her any more harm than a kitten if she had taken it up and nursed it, since it was quite harmless, and that he had described it as being poisonous merely to prevent any one opening the box out of curiosity.

"So that, one way and another, I think you'll agree with me, sir," concluded the old cabman, finishing his coffee and buttoning his cape, "that first 'find' of mine was just about as unlucky as my last one was lucky."

THE END.

Stirling, June 1890.

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*** *Earl Russell communicated to the College of Physicians that he had received a despatch from Her Majesty's Consul at Manilla, to the effect that Cholera had been raging fearfully, and that the ONLY remedy of any service was CHLORODYNE.*—See "Lancet," Dec. 31st, 1864.

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